

VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TROJAN WAR IN ATTIC CLAY VASES

Pottery is a primary source of evidence throughout the history of ancient Greece. Pervasive and almost indestructible, its generally predictable development means that it provides a basis to which other arts can be related.

Of all ancient Greek vases, those originating in Attica receive significant attention for several reasons. First, they outnumber the other Greek vases so far unearthed. Secondly, their painting techniques, especially, the black figure¹ and red figure² used in Attica, show some sophistication in the art and style which created them and thus reach the climax in the development of Greek vase paintings. Moreover, the decorations in these vases contain imagery that represents diverse themes, ranging from the scenes from the ancient Greek myths to those from daily life. The representations of Greek myth in both black and red figure vases range from mythological episodes referring to the Olympian deities to episodes associated with the epic cycles.

The quantity of academic research on this domain is notable and varies from general studies on Greek vases to more specialized studies on Athenian vases. J. D. Beazley's pioneering contribution to the study of ancient Greek vase paintings through a series of articles and books on Attic vase painting, painters and their techniques from 1910 until his death in 1970 in both English and German languages is invaluable. *Athenian Black Figure Vases* (1974, corrected version in 1991), *Athenian Red Figure Vases: the Archaic Period* (1975) and *Athenian Red Figure Vases: The Classical Period* (1989), *The History of Greek Vases: Potters, Painters and Pictures*, (2001) of J. Boardman are also of commendable service to students of Greek vase painting. Apart from these, detailed studies of T.H. Carpenter *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece* (1991), and of H. A. Shapiro *Myth into Art: Poet and Painter in Classical Greece* (1994), and the articles of A. M. Snodgrass 'Poet and Painter in Eighth-Century Greece' (1979), S. Lowenstam 'The Uses of Vase-depictions in Homeric Studies' (1992), 'Talking Vases: The Relationship between the Homeric Poems

¹ Decorations were painted in black and the background of the vase left in the brownish red colour of the clay.

² Decorations were left in the brownish red colour of the clay and the background of the vase painted in black.

and Archaic Representations of Epic Myth' (1997) specifically discuss the connection between Greek myth and art.

The present study observes how certain scenes of the Trojan War illustrated in Attic black and red figure vases deviate from the Homeric representations in the *Iliad* in order to re-examine possible causes for such deviations with a view to understanding the problems one may encounter when using visual representations as validations of poetic representations. Our attention here is limited to a sample of black and red figure vase paintings through which the deviations from the Homeric *Iliad* can be distinctly illustrated to facilitate the discussion.

It is generally known from the very outset of the study of Greek art³ that the ways of illustrating a story by an artist show basic differences to that by a poet. Moreover, the artist's gamut was constantly changing—partly, in response to external incentives and partly, in reflecting the internal dynamics of an art form.⁴ It was the practice of naming figures and scenes from as early as 650-630 BC⁵ which bestowed an identity to a particular scene, such as warriors fighting over a fallen comrade, a warrior carrying a dead comrade over his shoulder⁶, or a warrior arming for battle, which otherwise would have remained generic.⁷ It is such developments that enabled us to use visual depictions in Greek vases as confirmations of Greek literary and archaeological information.

As for visual demonstrations of the Homeric *Iliad*, Athenian black figure artists were comparatively less attracted to depict scenes from it. When they did, they mainly concentrated on the latter part of the poem, i.e. after Achilles' return to the battlefield, emphasizing Achilles' wrath towards Hector for killing Patrokles. Thus "Patroklos' funeral", "Achilles dragging dead Hector behind his chariot" are popular representations besides "the ransom of Hector". Some of the earlier depictions of Achilles refer to his arming either at home when setting out to the battle at Troy or at Troy (for the second time) when the first armour was lost with Patroklos.⁸ Yet, these themes from the *Iliad* are better represented by red figure artists who also showed themes such as "The Greek mission to Achilles", "The capture of Dolon," "The death of Sarpedon" "Duels" and "Warriors departing for battle."⁹ In general, there is apparently an early interest in scenes involving

³ In the eighteenth century.

⁴ For details see H.A. Shapiro, *Myth into Art: Poet and Painter in Classical Greece*, 1994, London and New York pp. 6-7.

⁵ S. Lowenstam, 'The Uses of Vase-depictions in Homeric Studies' *Transactions of the American Philological Association (TAPhA)* vol. 122, 1992, p.167 and note 7.

⁶ T.H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece*, 1991, London pp. 199, 203 & 206.

⁷ Another example would be the 'Pontic' amphora (540-530 BC) on which two heralds walk with three other men. This scene may remind us of the embassy to Achilles mentioned in the *Iliad*. But the reverse of the same vase, that shows three heralds and two legates, indicate that the paintings do not correspond to specific scenes in myth. See Lowenstam 1992, note 6.

⁸ After the red figure technique was introduced, black figure artists depicted as many scenes as they could from the Trojan cycle of myths along with the red figure artists. Yet, the choices of the black figure artists were limited to a few popular scenes (i.e. Peleus and Thetis, Judgement of Paris, Ajax carrying Achilles, Menelaos and Helen and Polyphemos) but the choices of the red figure artists mostly hovered around Achilles, apart from showing the basic Trojan scenes especially from the *Iliad* and *Ilupersis*: J. Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases*, 1975, London and New York, p. 230.

⁹ The latter scenes could only be identified thanks to the accompanying epigraphy.

Hector's death. The new stimulus to depict themes from the *Iliad* later in the sixth century B.C. may be due to Hipparchos' promotion of Homeric recitals at the Great Panathenaia.¹⁰

As Shapiro¹¹ points out, the manner and the strategy chosen by an artist to illustrate an episode, whether through a monoscenic¹², synoptic¹³, cyclic¹⁴ or continuous¹⁵ depiction of it differs very much from that of a poet due to a variety of reasons. These may range from the literacy of the artist, his social exposure and personal stimuli to the demands of the consumer. Besides these general variations between visual and poetic representations, there are also other reasons that could be adduced to explain the deviation of vase paintings from the Homeric versions.

One such reason is that the variant versions of the same myth or legend were known to the artist besides the Homeric poems. For instance, there could be poems highlighting different aspects or elements of a myth used by Homer. Thus, Homer was not the only source of influence for vase painters but dramatic representations (especially tragedy) and folktales had a similar impact.¹⁶ Cook has argued that folktales and stories told to painters may have been the primary source of epic subjects on vases before 530 BC.¹⁷ Moreover, Snodgrass has questioned artists' dependence on poetic sources even though he believed that the early influence of Homeric poems also had had a considerable impact on them.¹⁸

Furthermore, it is possible that a painter may not have known or may have forgotten the Homeric or traditional story. Further reasons as to why the painted scenes and their parallel Homeric versions do not correlate could be summarized as artistic license (i.e. reasons that induce an artist to have his paintings deliberately deviate from an established poem), which could be further classified as follows. First, the very difference of their respective media which acts as a kind of regulator in representing what is comfortably articulated in words. One example of this would be the multiple scenes on Achilles' shield as noted in the *Iliad* (18. 478-608).¹⁹ Then, the painters being not mere illustrators of Homer but artists who presented their own versions of myths sometimes induced them to create a summary by combining sequential scenes of a story. Thirdly, the use of traditional

¹⁰ J. Boardman, *Athenian Black figure Vases, a handbook*, 1991, (corrected version), London and New York, p. 229.

¹¹ Shapiro, 1994, pp. 7-9.

¹² A depiction of a single moment in a particular story which preserves the unity of time and space.

¹³ A combination of several different moments or episodes from a story put into a single picture and there is no unity of time and place.

¹⁴ A series of discrete episodes from a longer story that are physically separated from one another and a figure of a protagonist repeated in each episode.

¹⁵ A variant of the Cyclic, in which there are no physical boundaries between the individual episodes.

¹⁶ S. Lowenstam, 'Talking Vases: The Relationship between the Homeric Poems and Archaic Representations of Epic Myth' *TAPhA*, 1997, vol. 127: p. 22.

¹⁷ R.M. Cook, 'Art and Epic in Archaic Greece' *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving*, 1983, vol. 58: pp. 1-10.

¹⁸ A.M. Snodgrass, 'Poet and Painter in Eighth-Century Greece' *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 1979, vol. 205, pp. 118-130; *ibid.*, *An Archaeology of Greece*, 1987 Berkeley & Los Angeles; *ibid.*, 'Homer Effect' in the *Interpretation of Early Greek Art*, 1997, Cambridge.

¹⁹ No wall-painter, let alone a vase painter, is credited with such an endeavour.

iconography by the artists also made their works unique.²⁰ Finally, when painters added labels to a generic scene in order to bestow on the picture an individualized identity, details appropriate to the generic scene may clash with the new context.²¹

Having, thus, mentioned the reasons that may cause differences in the artistic and literary representations of Homeric accounts, we may next take individual vase paintings that show a variation from the Homeric version of which we are aware. In this study the photographs of vases follow the order of scenes in the *Iliad*.

The *Iliad* begins with the dispute between Agamemnon and Achilles over Briseis, the concubine of Achilles. According to the Homeric version, though Agamemnon threatens to take her from Achilles, he does not actually lead her out in person from Achilles' lodging (l. 318-326). References to Agamemnon's seizure of Briseis are rare in ancient art. An Attic calyx-krater, datable to 490 BC and attributed to the Eucharides Painter, depicts the embassy to Achilles with a deviation from the Homeric version as the artist replaces Ajax with Diomedes. According to the Homeric version, Ajax, Odysseus and Phoenix visited Achilles with the proposal of Agamemnon to regain his help to fight the Trojans. As for Diomedes, he was one of the younger and most enthusiastic of the Achaean heroes who showed steady loyalty to Agamemnon and the Greek mission, stirring the Greeks with his cheerful determination to fight to the end when Agamemnon, in despair, was proposing to abandon the siege and return home.²²



Fig. 1. The Eucharides Painter's calyx-krater.²³ Side A: Embassy to Achilles.

²⁰ Lowenstam, 1992, p. 170. One of the ancient associations of the home was a dog, as is seen in Exekias' famous depiction of the departure of the Dioscuri.

²¹ For a detailed discussion on these points see. Lowenstam, 1992, pp. 168-174; *ibid.* 1997, pp. 22-23.

²² Homer also records his consistent loyalty to Agamemnon and to the Greek cause.

²³ Side A: Embassy to Achilles. Seated Odysseus talks to sulking and heavily draped Achilles. Phoenix and Diomedes frame the scene: Shapiro, 1994 fig. 9. Side B of this vase shows Hypnos and Thanatos carrying the body of Sarpedon. The picture is very fragmentary. The mission to Achilles is also shown in a stamnos by the Triptolemos painter [see Boardman, 1975, fig.304.1]. Besides these, several other artists have decorated their vases with this theme.

Though one may argue that this difference is due to the painter's ignorance of the Homeric version,²⁴ Eucharides seems to be cautious with his replacement since he retains the other two crucial figures, Odysseus (most renowned of the Achaeans for his cleverness and persuasive speech) and Phoenix (who is like a second father to Achilles). Though true to the Greek cause, Ajax's lack of guile may not transmit the true sense of Agamemnon's offer. Thus, by bringing Diomedes into the scene, the painter may have used his artistic inventiveness to bring about the sincerity of Agamemnon's offer.

Nonetheless, the true Homeric account is shown on one side of an Attic red-figure cup datable to 480 B. C. It shows heralds leading Briseis away from Achilles who sits mourning in his tent.²⁵ A contemporary skyphos also depicts the mission to Achilles (*Iliad* 9. 182ff) sent by Agamemnon in full correspondence to the Homeric account.²⁶ Here, a heavily draped Achilles sits on a stool while Ajax, Odysseus and Phoenix stand on either side of him. Yet, the image on the other side of this very same skyphos does not correlate to the Homeric narration. (fig. 2, below).



Fig. 2. Attic red-figure skyphos, attributed to Makron. c.480-470.²⁷
Side A: Agamemnon leads Briseis away from Achilles' tent.

²⁴ Lowenstam, 1997, pp. 169-170.

²⁵ Briseis led away from Achilles. Attic red-figure cup by Briseis Painter. C. 480 BC. From Shapiro, 1994, fig. 4.



Side B of this vase shows the continuation of the scene in side A and shows Briseis arriving at Agamemnon's camp. *Ibid* fig. 5.

²⁶ Embassy to Achilles, side B of the skyphos of figure 1 above. From Shapiro, 1994, fig. 8.



²⁷ Shapiro, 1994, figure 7. Paris, Louvre G146.

Here, Agamemnon (the figure is clearly labelled thus) himself fetches Briseis with Diomedes and the herald Talthymbios as his companions. The herald is indicated by the *kerykeion* and all figures are named and only the presence of the herald tallies with the Homeric version. Could it be that Makron was using an alternate version of the myth? Yet, a close observation of the elements in the *Iliad* itself may probably have guided Makron to depict his scene with Agamemnon. As just mentioned, although Agamemnon does not fetch Briseis himself in the *Iliad*, his initial threat to Achilles mentions that he himself would take her away (*Iliad* 1.137-139, 184-185). Furthermore, when Briseis was taken away, Achilles' complaint to his mother, Thetis, was that Agamemnon snatch his prize from him (*Iliad* 1. 356). Similarly, when Nestor later advises Agamemnon to make amends, he (Agamemnon) refers to the action as of his own.

G.S. Kirk, taking such evidence in the *Iliad* into consideration, argues that Agamemnon's threat may have created a great impact on the minds of some characters²⁸ and Makron was simply projecting such an impact in the vase painting. Based on this same evidence, Teffeteller²⁹ also argues that involving Agamemnon in the act is merely arbitrary and refers to the injury it causes Achilles. Lowenstam, further, points out that one possibility of the deviation of Makron's work and of any other painter who depicts a man escorting a woman could be that they were misled by the ambiguity of the phrase *au)to/j a)pou/raj* [lit. led by himself] (*Iliad* 1. 356).³⁰ But referring to the scene on the other side of the same vase by this painter, which is true to the Homeric version (i.e. embassy to Achilles with Phoenix, Ajax and Odysseus) Lowenstam correctly concludes that Makron was showing an alternate version known to him where Agamemnon fetches the girl away. Lowenstam further mentions that Homer was probably aware of both versions and his poetic mastery has enabled him to fuse both versions in one poem.³¹ Though Lowenstam does not discuss the inclusion of Diomedes in the former scene, one could suggest that Diomedes, the Greek warrior ever loyal to Agamemnon, may have been in an alternate version, if not in a previous illustration,³² used by the painter though Homer excludes him from the Briseis episode.³³ Accordingly, Makron not only shows his scholarship but also his artistic excellence through this demonstration. However, it is difficult to recognize deviations from the Homeric version as examples of pure artistic license as it is hard to discover whether a particular artist was inspired by a scene from a lost oral, visual or a literary source.

A scene that is considerably different from the Homeric version is the depiction of the removal of the dead body of the Lycian Sarpedon (a son of Zeus and one of the great defenders of Troy) from the battlefield by Euphronios. It is Apollo whom Zeus chooses to watch over the rescuing of Sarpedon's body because he is well disposed to the Trojan side

²⁸ G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 1, 1985, Cambridge, p. 72.

²⁹ A. Teffeteller, 'AUTOS APOURAS *Iliad* 1.356' *Classical Quarterly* 1990, vol. 40, pp. 17-19.

³⁰ Also cf. Lowenstam, 1997, p. 43.

³¹ *Ibid*, 1997, p. 44. Knowledge of the version in which Agamemnon snatched the girl is limited to verbal threats and communications but in describing the real action Homer omits Agamemnon instilling more prestige and honour to the character of Agamemnon.

³² Note, as discussed above, that a decade ago the Eucharides painter had already replaced Ajax with Diomedes.

³³ Also see. Shapiro, 1994, p. 16.

and also because he was the healing god of the Greeks. Apollo was to entrust the task to the twin brothers Hypnos (Sleep) and Thanatos (Death) (*Iliad* 16. 667-683). Euphronius has depicted this account twice and each scene is different from the other. The earlier depiction dated to c. 520 B.C, is modest in scale and is without a divine aura feeling as in Homer. But Hypnos and Thanatos seem to struggle under the weight of the body beside a person labelled Acamas, (who plays no part in the Homeric version) who leads the company. Yet, the artist chooses Acamas here to symbolize that the body would be transported to distant Lycia because the typical characteristic of Acamas is his interest in distant places.³⁴



Fig. 3. Attic red-figure cup signed by Euphronios. c.520 B.C.³⁵

Noteworthy are the changes that accompany the second illustration of the same scene by Euphronius, few years later, on a calyx-crater datable to 515-510 B.C. The moment depicted is just before the body is being lifted by Hypnos and Thanatos. Yet, the spirit is much closer to the Homeric model as the divine twins seem much relaxed. Presenting the duo with splendid wings, an element Homer never mentions, is apparently a logical inference of the artist to manage the transportation of Sarpedon's body to distant Lycia. The one who watches over the task, here, is Hermes, not Apollo, and his inclusion once again seems logical due to his double role as the messenger of Zeus and as the conductor of souls of the dead (*psychopompos*).³⁶ Thus, his presence may indicate that the operation was done under the command of Zeus. The omission of Apollo may have permitted to show the uncleaned and unclouted body of Sarpedon as these were the tasks entrusted to Apollo in the Homeric account. Finally, by framing the scene with Leodamas and HIPPOLYTOS, two figures not mentioned in the Homeric version in this regard, the painter may simply have intended to indicate the battlefield from which the body was removed³⁷ because Leodamas and Hippolytos were Trojan warriors killed in battle before Sarpedon.

³⁴ See E. Kearns, s.v. 'Acamas' *Oxford Classical Dictionary* third ed. By S. Hornblower & A. Spawforth. 1999, Oxford p. 2 for detail. Though Acamas was not known in Homeric *Iliad*. He is present in the *Iliu Persis* and in the later mythological tradition.

³⁵ Shapiro, 1994, fig. 12.

³⁶ D. von Bothmer, 'Der Euphronios-krater in New York' *Antike und Abendland*, 1976, vol. 91: p. 485; Lowenstam, 1997, p. 35 note 45.

³⁷ Shapiro, 1994, pp. 23-25.

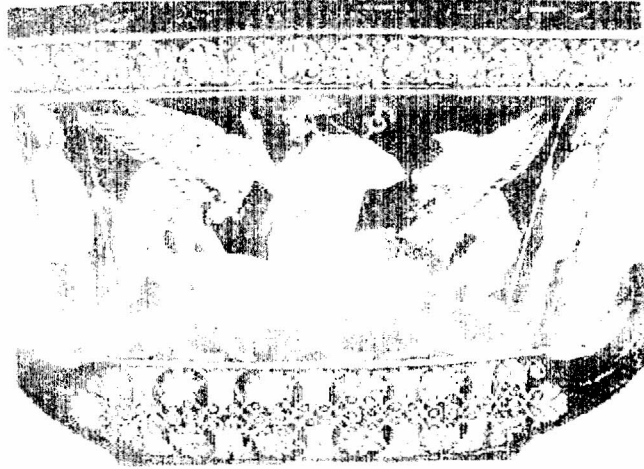


Fig. 4. Attic red-figure calyx-crater signed by Euphronios (painter) and Euxitheos (potter).³⁸

Thus, in both illustrations, we observe that by introducing figures new to the corresponding scene, Euphronios does not show his ignorance or confusion. Instead, it demonstrates that he is not a mere illustrator of poetic narrations but that he possessed the skill in fusing his learning with his artistic originality to produce a masterpiece.

As noted above, the early black figure painters focused on the later part of the *Iliad*. A few Attic black-figure vase painters of the sixth century preferred to depict Achilles dragging or preparing to drag the body of Hektor.³⁹ An Attic black-figure hydria of the Leargos group dated to c. 520 BC is notable in this regard as the artist skillfully managed to condense, in his crowded yet clearly articulated work of art, many moments that spread across several books of the *Iliad*. Achilles is about to leap into his chariot in which the charioteer already stands and to which the body of Hektor has been attached. As he looks back he confronts Priam and Hekuba who stands beneath a Doric entablature, watching this gruesome spectacle. Although Hektor's parents witness the mutilation of their son's body (*Iliad* 22. 396-415) it is the artist who brings them to such terrifying closeness to the act. As the horses of Achilles disappear from the scene in the top right-hand corner, the soul of Patroklos flies away from his omphalos-shaped tomb, indicating that the body is dragged around the tomb of Patroklos (*Iliad* 24. 14-17). The woman in the centre gesturing to stop could be identified as Iris, who in the Homeric version, was sent to Thetis by Zeus asking her to persuade Achilles to stop the gruesome act. Then Zeus sends Iris again to Priam to encourage him to ransom the body of Hektor from Achilles (*Iliad* 24. 104-187). The attempt of the painter here could be to combine both episodes in one scene by employing Iris to convey both messages by convening all characters necessary to understand the episode. Thus, the gesture of Iris signals to Achilles that he must end the dragging while signaling to Priam that he must visit Achilles.⁴⁰ Thus, the painter has compressed both time and space to show his story through his artistic ingenuity.

³⁸ Carpenter, 1991, fig. 310 and Shapiro, 1994, fig. 13.

³⁹ Interestingly, this theme has not captured the attention of the red-figure vase painters.

⁴⁰ Also see. Shapiro, 1994, pp. 27-31 and Lowenstam, 1992, pp. 177-178



Fig. 5. Attic black-figure hydria of the Leargos group. c. 520, 49.6 cm.⁴¹

A significant scene in the *Iliad*, yet rarely depicted by the vase painters of the first half of the sixth century, was the chariot race at the funeral games held for Patroklos (*Iliad* 23. 261-270). It appears in two black-figure vases decorated by Sophilos and Kleitias which deserve attention in this study as they are far from the Homeric version.

On a fragment of a dinos by Sophilos, dated to 580-570 BC, tiny men constituting the audience are seated while huge chariot-horses race towards them. Achilles' name appears, though he is missing, as the one presiding over the event and an unusual inscription (*Patroklos atla*: 'Games in honour of Patroklos') identifies the scene as the funeral games of Patroklos. The preserved fragment contains the horses of the winning chariot and part of the winner's name, ending in 'OS' which does not correspond to the name of the winner of this event in the *Iliad*, i.e. Diomedes, showing that Sophilos was not following the Homeric version we know which perhaps was not yet established by the first quarter of the sixth century B.C.



Fig 6. Upper freize of Attic black-figure dinos from Pharsalos signed by Sophilos.⁴²

⁴¹ Shapiro, 1994, figure 16 and also see Carpenter, 1991, fig. 316 The scene depicted on the shoulder of another Attic black-figure hydria of the Leargos group of c. 510-500 also shows Achilles dragging the body of Hektor and it is different from the vase painting discussed above and it is less complicated.

The painting of Kleitias was the best preserved and is on the neck of the Attic black-figure volute-krater known as the François vase. In this, chariots race having passed the turning post toward Achilles who stands in front of a bronze tripod which, along with a dinos and another tripod in the background were probably meant as prizes. As in the Homeric account, five charioteers compete at the event, but only Diomedes occurs in correspondence to the Homeric narration (*Iliad* 23. 352-361, 448-460, 506-513). Moreover, though Diomedes is the winner in Homer he is put in third place by Kleitias, and shows Odysseus,⁴³ who is not even mentioned with regard to the chariot race in the *Iliad*, as the winner.⁴⁴ Perhaps, Odysseus' fame as a talented athlete may have persuaded Kleitias to make him the winner.⁴⁵



Fig. 7

⁴² Carpenter, 1991 fig. 315. Also see Shapiro, 1994 fig. 18 and Richter, *A Handbook of Greek Art*, 1959, London, fig. 431.

⁴³ Mentioned as Olyteus the Archaic variant of Odysseus.

⁴⁴ Naturally, like most others, I believe the one in the front looks like the winner though some may argue that by placing Diomedes in the middle the artist intend to present him as the key figure. See Lowenstam, 1997, p. 28 note 17 and p. 51 note 94.

⁴⁵ Full vase of Kleitias c. 570-560, details of which is shown in the text.



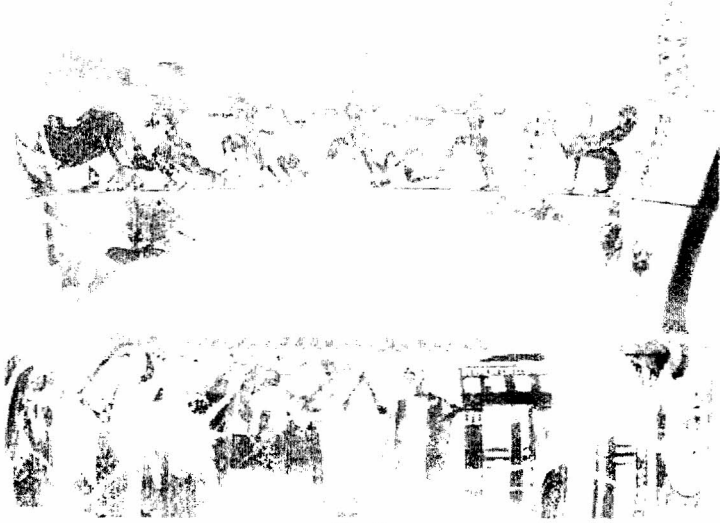


Fig.8

Fig. 7, 8. Detail of the Attic black-figure volute-krater ('Francois vase') by Kleitias..⁴⁶

These differences between the poetic and artistic versions could either be due to the painter's ignorance of the Homeric account, his faulty memory of the Homeric version, his decision to base the drawing on one or a few independent traditions known to him, or his original creativity.⁴⁷

The Homeric *Iliad* ends with the ransoming of Hektor's body by Priam. One out of several versions⁴⁸ of this scene was chosen by some artists who decorated both black and red-figure vases from 570-480 B.C. The vase paintings that depict the ransom of Hektor, presented in this study, provide fine examples of artistic license.⁴⁹ In Homer, only Idaios attends Priam (*Iliad*. 24. 469-471), the treasure is left outside Achilles' tent in the wagon (*Iliad*. 24. 572-581), Achilles has finished his meal and taken all precautions not to expose the body of Hektor to Priam (*Iliad*. 24. 584ff).

In the Attic black-figure hydria presented below, Priam is accompanied by Hermes and a servant bearing ransom for Achilles who lies beneath the dining table of Achilles. The woman to the right might be the one ordered to wash the body of Hektor.

⁴⁶ M.M. Fullerton, *Greek Art*, 2000, Cambridge & New York, fig. 71. Also cf. Shapiro, 1994, fig. 19 & Richter, 1959, fig. 432b.

⁴⁷ For more discussion on different interpretations of including different winners and participants see Lowenstam, 1992, pp. 176-177; *ibid*, 1997, p. 51 and Shapiro, 1994, pp. 33-37.

⁴⁸ Two other versions of this same account are shown in Shield bands and on a Melian relief. The latter is based on the lost play *Phrygians* of Aeschylus.

⁴⁹ Also see Lowenstam, 1992, p. 175.



Fig.9. Attic black-figure hydria. Attributed to the Painter of London.
The ransom of Hektor. c. 570-560.⁵⁰

In the Attic red-figure cup from Vulci, Achilles, reclining on a couch beneath which is the body of Hektor, is holding a drinking cup and is looking at a woman, presumably Briseis, who places a wreath on his head. Priam approaches with a servant carrying a hydria and three phialai, and having led Priam to Achilles' tent, Hermes departs. Also notable is the food (bread and meat) on the table beside Achilles.



Fig 10. Attic red-figure cup from Vulci. Ransom of Hektor. c.520.⁵¹

The illustration on the red-figure cup below also shows Priam escorted by Hermes and a train of servants bearing treasures (continued to side B of the vase) approaching Achilles in supplication. Achilles is reclining over a couch holding a sword in his right hand when a woman (probably Briseis) is about to place a wreath on him. The sword

⁵⁰ Shapiro, 1994, fig. 24. Also see Boardman 1975, fig. 241 1, 2 for scenes of ransom of Hektor in a white ground Lekythos vase .

⁵¹ Carpenter, 1991, fig. 318.

probably symbolizes his temper, authority and power. The interior of the cup also shows a private conversation between Achilles and Priam.⁵²

Here, just as in the above parallel illustrations, the painter deviates from the position of being a mere illustrator of Homeric accounts. Instead, he uses his imagination to create a synopsis of the entire episode of ransoming the body of Hektor by merging more than one sequential scenes into a single frame.

Side A

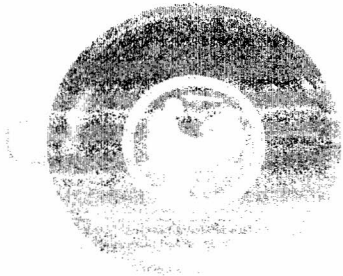


Side B



Fig. 11. Attic red-figure cup, attributed to the painter of the fourteenth Brygos. c. 480B.C.⁵³
Ransom of Hektor.

⁵² Interior of figure 12 of this study: Attic red-figure cup, attributed to the painter of the fourteenth Brygos. From Shapiro, 1994, fig. 27.



⁵³ Side A: Shapiro, 1994, fig. 25 & Side B: *ibid.* fig. 26.

Some identical features can be observed in all vase paintings that depict the ransom of Hektor, such as Priam accompanied by a group of men and women bearing rich treasures while Achilles is shown feasting, reclined on a couch beneath which the body of Hektor lies easily visible to Priam who approaches from the left as a suppliant. The resulting picture is a busy conveyance of ransom and the shocking spectacle of Priam appealing to the killer, who feasts, having the corpse of his prey within his reach, to return the corpse of his son. Sometimes, Priam is shown accompanied by Hermes, suggesting that it is divine will that he achieves his purpose. Without the presence of the body of Hektor and the treasure, the scene may not be evident as the 'ransom of Hektor' unless it is labelled in the background of the vase. Thus, the very artistic license has also enabled the artist to produce a comprehensive scene from the *Iliad*, though such details led to make these scenes differ from the Homeric depiction.

In conclusion, what is apparent is that while some Greek vase painters illustrate scenes in correspondence to the Homeric version of the *Iliad*, some of these painters were perhaps influenced either by multifarious issues such as the availability of different Homeric versions, dramatic representations and visual representations of scenes from the *Iliad* by their predecessors. Apart from this, the artists probably attempted to overcome the drawbacks in the art-form, such as the limited space and the difficulties caused by the media, by using their imagination, inventive skills and the effective use of iconographic representations which in turn led to the artistic representation of a scene to be different from the parallel poetic representation. When this occurs, it is hard to rely on artistic representations on vases as validations of poetic representations or vice versa. Such deviations, however, can be a valuable source of information for historians in attempting to filter evidence about the level of learning of the artists and their contemporary society, about the artistic demands and interests of the time, and also about the independence of the artists to develop their skill and trade.

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