

The three ages of man. Myth and symbol between Chiusi and Athens

Marjatta Nielsen

THIS CONTRIBUTION takes us to the world of images. As such, the element of symbol is embedded in the very nature of images: they *are* not what they seem to be, but charged with meaning when being produced, and again—if the artist has succeeded in his efforts—in the viewer's mind. To give visual form to anything at all is a highly cognitive process, and the more so, when complicated stories have to be told by visual means. Images are also able to express and arouse emotions, and they may even work on an unconscious level (at least the advertising business is relies on that).

Here I will be dealing with problems of decoding consciously chosen metaphors in ancient art, such which go beyond the immediately evident contents of the image. When trying to 'read' messages in ancient imagery we are of course on a rather uncertain ground, since truly iconological studies presuppose access to contemporary documents about the artists' and the customers' intentions, and an intimate knowledge of the mental frames in the given period. Yet, even in the case of Etruscan art we may often be on the safe side, thanks to occasional explanatory inscriptions, and to centuries of research in the field of ancient pictorial conventions.

I discuss two exceptional funerary reliefs, one Etruscan and one Greek, where the artist has not had recourse to compositions from a conventional stock repertoire of motifs. The Etruscan relief has narrative contents, the Greek one not. The question is whether these scenes were intended to be 'read' on more than one symbolic level (if any). As a case study I have chosen representations of one or more persons appearing at three different ages—that is, a categorizing, structuring task for the artist—and ask whether they might contribute to the discussion of cognitive versus affective nature of myth and symbol, the focus of this volume.

My point of departure is an Etruscan relief from the early second century BC at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen (Nielsen 1996:no.31). The relief adorns the front of a cinerary urn of alabaster, in which a certain Aule Vetana was

buried (Fig. 1). The subject matter of the relief has been an enigma ever since it was found in 1841 in a chamber tomb at Cetona, a few kilometers from Chiusi/Clusium. The city of the legendary king Porsenna in the inner Northern Etruria was not at all as isolated as one might think—also such famous Attic vases as the François vase, and the *skyphos* with Penelope sitting by her loom, had found their way there.

Also in the case of this relief, we can without hesitation identify its subject matter as something drawn from Greek mythology, since we can easily recognize the figure of Odysseus to the right. The rest has been subject to highly divergent interpretations.¹



Fig. 1. Aule Vetana's urn from Cetona near Chiusi, early 2nd cent. BC, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek H.I.N. 59 (photo M. Nielsen)

1 For shorter versions of the new interpretation, see Nielsen 1999a and b, and for a fuller account of the previous interpretations as well as for a more detailed rationale for the present one, see Nielsen, forthcoming. Here I will just pick up the issues relevant in the present context.

In the following discussion, the single figures in the scene are referred to according to the following numbering (Fig. 2):

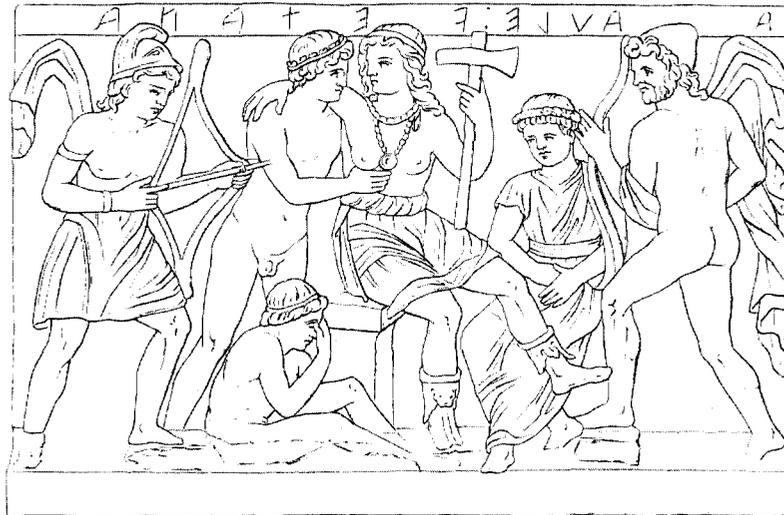


Fig. 2. Aule Vetana's urn relief (drawing from Brunn 1870:pl. 97,8), and a table with the principal identifications of the single figures. For the sources Nielsen forthcoming

Fig. nos.	1	2	3	4	5	6
A)1842			Hercules	soul of Alcestis	Proserpina	
B)1842	Telema-chus	suitor	suitor	Prosepina/ demon	Euryclea/ Penelope	Odysseus
C)1929	Trojan		Achilles	Penthe-silea		Odysseus
D)1996	Paris		Helenus			Odysseus
E)1996	Paris in Trojan war	Paris exposed	Paris recognized	Cassandra	Cassandra	Odysseus in Trojan war
F)1998	Paris in Trojan war	Paris exposed	Paris recognized	Cassandra reconciled	Hecuba dreaming	Odysseus in Trojan war
Time levels	4	2	3	3>4	1>2	4

- (1) The archer to the left,
- (2) the figure sitting on the ground covering his face,
- (3) the naked youth, who is embracing
- (4) a female figure sitting on an altar with an axe in her hand;
- (5) another sitting figure;
- (6) the archer to the right, clearly representing Odysseus.

The table also gives the main interpretations (letters A-F) and the years when they were launched in the column to the left. The first interpretation (A), 'Hercules embracing the soul of Alcestis in the presence of Proserpina,' was put forward by the excavator, captain Sozzi, but abandoned at the outset. The most long-lived interpretations have been 'Odysseus killing Penelope's suitors' (B), and 'Achilles and Penthesilea falling in love at the moment of her death' (C). Within these general frames, individual scholars have proposed many identifications to the single figures. The unanswered questions have invariably been explained as due to 'Etruscan misunderstandings,' the convenient standard solution for scholars.²

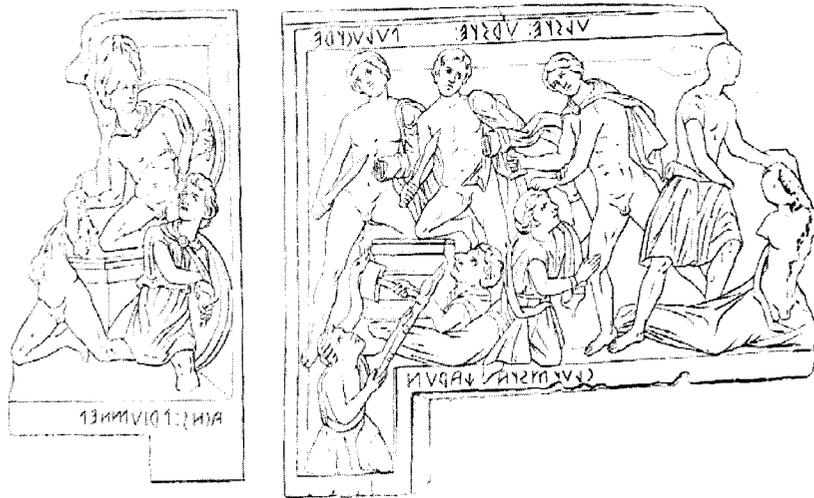


Fig. 3. Urn relief with motifs from the *Oresteia*, early second cent. BC. Orestes (Ulste) is killing Clytemnestra (Clutmsta), and probably Aegisthus as well (to the right; the inscription now vanished); Orestes (Urste) is again kneeling on the altar to the left, together with Pylades (Puluctre), while the death demons Charun with his mallet and Vanth with her torch survey the scene from below. The left, short side of the urn likewise showed a Trojan scene, as testified by the name of Priam/Priumnes. Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 345 (from Brunn 1870:pl.80:10)

2 By now much work has been done to contradict the simplistic views, by exploring the perception and refined uses of Greek myths in Etruria, latest e.g. Pairault Massa 1992, d'Agostino and Cerchiai 1999. More generally for Greek myth in the West, see also *Epos greco in Occidente* 1980, *Mythe grec dans l'Italie antique* 1999.

Unconvinced by the previous interpretations, I have tried to work on other possibilities, taking into consideration that more complex techniques of pictorial narrative might be utilized, since several Etruscan representations operate with multiple time levels in the same scene.³ For example, on a Volterrannan urn relief we see that Orestes appears at least twice, as confirmed by the inscriptions (Fig. 3).⁴

On our Chiusine relief, one of the figures whose identity is crucial for the story, is the woman sitting on the altar with an axe. She has previously been taken as the Etruscan female death demon, Vanth, or as Penthesilea falling in love with Achilles. Vanth does not normally have an axe, but a torch, snakes, or the like,⁵ but here her attribute has been thought to be due to a contamination with the male death demon's mallet—which would mean that the Etruscans made mistakes even with their own iconographies.

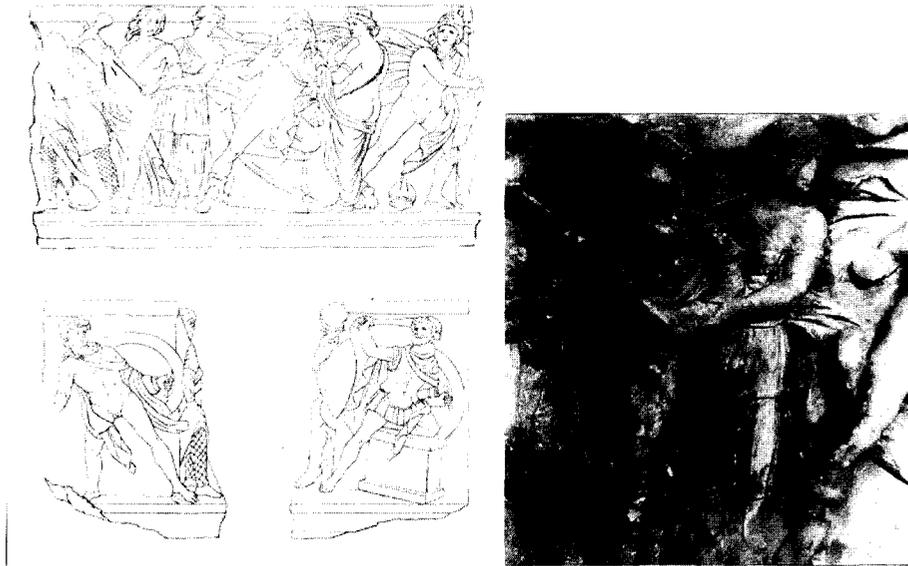


Fig. 4. *The Recognition of Paris, with a seminude Cassandra restrained by Hecuba. The scene is flanked on the short sides by warriors. Alabaster urn from the early-mid second century BC, Volterra 384 (from Brunn 1870:pl. 11,24; photo M. Nielsen)*

- 3 Etruscan examples given e.g. by Harari 1995, Nielsen 1999a-b, *ead.* forthcoming; Maggiani 2000. For complex pictorial narratives more generally, see e.g. Brilliant 1987, Small 1999, Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999.
- 4 Volterra, Museo Guarnacci inv. 345: Brunn 1870:99, pl.80:10, van der Meer 1978:32, 59, 104f., *CUV* 2,2:no. 147. For other Oresteia-urns (often with more than one moment of the story shown together), Brunn 1870:pls. 74-85, Nielsen 1996:no. 28, Maggiani 2000:9-12, with references to possible Greek models.
- 5 s.v. Vanth, *LIMC* 8 (1997):173-83, pls. 122-27 (Weber-Lehmann).

As to Achilles and Penthesilea falling in love, I think that the flabby youth with no weapons or armour whatsoever would be hardly convincing as Achilles, and so would the calmly sitting woman without any signs of being wounded be as Penthesilea.

A rapid survey of Etruscan (and other ancient) representations of women with axes revealed many others than Amazons:⁶ hunters like Atalanta, raving Maenads, Clytemnestra, priestesses, and so on.⁷ In Etruscan art, however, the most assiduous axe-swinger is the prophetess Cassandra, who appears in many scenes depicting 'the Recognition of Paris,' swinging the sacrificial axe which belonged to her outfit as the priestess of Athena (Fig. 4).⁸ This has brought me to consider the possibility of attributing even this relief to the story of Paris/Alexandros (Fig. 2, interpretations E-F).⁹

According to this hypothesis, the Chiusine sculptor has created an original composition, in which he managed to describe the whole prehistory of the Trojan war, with the Trojan prince Paris/Alexandros as the key figure. He would then appear no less than thrice, namely as the three figures to the left (Fig. 2):

—As a child (2), exposed on Mount Ida and believed to be dead; the small boy is sitting naked on the ground, hiding his face behind his hands, a very eloquent gesture of desolation, abandonment, of 'being and non-being.'¹⁰

—As a youth (3), the anonymous winner of the funeral games arranged in his honour. Here the only sign of victory is the golden wreath on his head (*cf.* Martelli 1994:171 fig. 5), perhaps because here he has no hands free to hold the customary palm leaf. This is the moment just after his recognition and the attacks on his life:

6 *s.v.* Amazones, *LIMC* 1 (1981):586-653, pls. 440-526 (Devambezi/Kauffmann-Samaras), which show that the axe was not very common as amazonic weapon elsewhere than in Etruria. For Etruria, *s.v.* Amazones Etruriae, *LIMC* 1 (1981):654-62 (Mavleev) (with Aule Vetana's urn on pl.528:no.17a).

7 Atalanta in Calydonian boar hunt, Körte 1896:141-55, pls. 57-61; *CUV* 2,2:nos. 4-9. For Clytemnestra, Viret-Bernall 1996. Priestesses with sacrificial axes are an Etruscan feature, Maggiani 2000:11. For persons threatened at an altar, also with swords and knives, Steuernagel 1998.

8 Brunn 1870:pl. 11:24 (Volterra 384), pl. 12:25 (Volterra 236), pl. 12:26 (Volterra 239), pl. 13:27 (Florence 5343), pl. 13:28 (Volterra 227), pl. 16:33 (Chiusi, Palazzo Vescovile).—For the figure of Cassandra in art and literature, *s.v.* Cassandra, *LIMC* 7 (1997):956-70, pls. 671-85 (Paoletti), and latest Mangold 2000 (with no Recognition scenes or axes), Mazzoldi 2001.

9 Only sketched in a few lines by Nielsen 1996:no. 31, and at various degrees of elaboration *ead.* 1999a-b, and forthcoming.

10 This precise iconography was probably invented by 'the Vetana Master' himself, but in Etruscan and Greek art there are some analogous figures, sitting or squatting on the ground, naked or wrapped in a mantle, with or without hands covering their faces. These figures express despair, exhaustion by sorrow, exposed situations in general, *e.g.* as refugees, and only apparent death. The Vetana master also used an almost similar posture meaning 'seeing with closed eyes,' *i.e.* learning or memorizing divination.

the young brother and the older sister have now been reconciled, embracing each other. This confidence would, however, fail, and the evasion from the doom of Troy proved to be illusory.

—Finally, we have Paris as an adult (1), after the abduction of Helen, and the beginning of the Trojan war, while the final result of Cassandra's prophecy, the destruction of Troy, is imminent. Paris, now wearing his customary Phrygian cap, represents the Trojan party in the war, while Odysseus is the sole representative of the Greek adversaries. The two were also protagonists in the war while Paris was to blame for it. Significantly, the archers are pointing their weapons towards each others, while their eyes are directed towards the crowd in the centre, *i.e.*, towards the past happenings.



Fig. 5. Urn relief with the Recognition of Paris, early second century BC, Chiusi, Palazzo Vescovile (from Brunn 1870:pl. 16,33)

Such a complex story of Paris is unique on Etruscan urns, while the Recognition scene is quite common. In those scenes, Paris is kneeling on the altar, seeking salvation, with the palm-leaf of victory—or a sword—in his hand, while a varying array of his family members—the brother Deiphobus, the sister Cassandra, his mother Hecuba, father Priam or others, are either trying to kill him or prevent it from happening (Figs. 4-7).¹¹ The reason for the aggression was initially the shame, which the supposed slave-winner of the games would have inflicted upon the royal house. Then, after being recognised by Cassandra, either she or their mother Hecuba tried to kill him with an axe in order to prevent future disasters,

while Deiphobus is seen with a sword. On these urns, there are plenty of variations as to who is doing what, but this was the case also with Greek tragedies based on the theme.¹² On our relief Cassandra has let her axe rest, but her sacerdotal gowns are out of order, as a sign of her frantic behaviour just before.

On the Copenhagen relief there still remains one enigmatic figure to be identified, the one sitting in the middle of the turmoil, as if in his or her own thoughts (Fig. 2:5). There are many possibilities—Cassandra at the moment of her first prophecy at Paris' birth, Helen abducted by Paris, or perhaps Penelope patiently waiting for the return of Odysseus.¹³ However, I prefer to consider her as Paris' mother, Hecuba, who, when pregnant with Paris, had a strange dream. The woman here does not seem to be sleeping, but rather day-dreaming, which is not necessarily against the story.¹⁴ Her old-fashioned hair-dress, typical of Etruscan brides and young women in the Classical and early Hellenistic periods (an example of 'antiquarian consciousness'), her large hands significantly resting on her womb, and her introverted expression make Hecuba my favourite candidate for the figure, the starting point of the whole sequence of tragic events. Therefore, she is placed slightly in the background, but not at the margins of the scene. Not by chance, her face and body are turned into the direction of the exposed Paris.¹⁵

11 Brunn 1870:4-22, pls. 1-15, *s.v.* Alexandros, *LIMC* 1 (1981):494-529, pls. 374-96 (Hampe and Krauskopf), *s.v.* Deiphobos, *LIMC* 3 (1986):362-67 (Kahil), *CUV* 2,2:nos. 74-98, *Steuernagel* 1998:62-73, nos. 110-80, pls. 24-31. Before urns, the motif was in its most concise form known on Etruscan relief-covered box mirrors, probably of Tarquinian production, *e.g. s.v.* Cassandra, *LIMC* 7 (1994):956-70, pls. 671-85 (Paoletti).

12 The tragedies by Sophocles, Euripides, and Ennius are lost, so Hyginus *Fab.* 91 (also quoted by Brunn 1870:5) is the ancient passage which fits best to the Etruscan urn reliefs. Brunn considered the possibility of a relationship between the Etruscan urn motifs and the development of early Roman theatre, including Ennius' *Alexandros*, but discarded the idea, believing that the urns were from the 3rd century BC, and not from the 2nd and 1st centuries. Since then a papyrus with the *hypothesis* of Euripides' *Alexandros* has been found. On the literary evidence and the relationship with Etruscan urn reliefs, Snell 1937, Jouan 1966:113-42, Coles 1974:esp. 26-32. On the relationships between the urn iconographies and the tragedies, see also Van der Meer 1978:107, *id.* 1991:132, Nielsen 1993:341-45.

13 The pros and contras of the various possibilities are examined more closely in Nielsen, forthcoming.

14 Euripides makes Hecuba sleep (Coles 1974:13), while Hyginus, *Fab.* 91 states that she saw the dream while *in quiete*, which may mean both while 'resting' and 'sleeping.' Sleepers are often represented in more or less sitting postures in ancient art, Stafford 1993.

15 The royal family of Troy (Hecuba, Priam, Hector, Paris and Helen) also appears on a 3rd-century Etruscan mirror from Vulci, but in a peaceful composition without prophetic elements: *LIMC* 7 (1994):511 *s.v.* Priamos no. 24 (Neils). In the Augustan period, Hecuba's dream and what followed seems to have been used as a thoroughly learned dynastic metaphor in the frieze on the famous Portland vase, where another dreaming woman refers to Augustus' family history; the destruction of Troy would prove a necessary positive event, since it brought Aeneas to Italy: *Vetri dei Cesari* 1988:nos. 29-30, Moreno 2002.

The pictorial narrative is here told in a ‘hierarchical’ sequence (*cf.* Small 1999:562-65), the beginning being shown in the centre and the later developments at the margins. The directions of the protagonists’ eyes and bodies help us remain on track. The sequence of the prophecies and their fulfilments are evolving in the scene in a centrifugal, spiral movement, giving further visual expression to the cyclical notion of time, which seemed to play a fundamental role in Etruscan culture.

In theatrical performances the past prophecies were mostly inserted as flash-backs and ‘flash-forwards’ in the middle of the present-time happenings. On some Etruscan urn reliefs, Cassandra—who was much older than Paris—is seen as a young girl, *i.e.* at the time of her prophecy at Paris’ birth (Fig. 6).¹⁶



Fig. 6. Urn relief with the Recognition of Paris, ca. 50 BC. Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 227 (Brunn 1870:pl. 13,28)

This interplay between prediction and their fulfilment, between past, present and future is not an exclusively Etruscan feature, since many Greek dramas were based on such plots, in spite of the requirements of unity of space and time in Greek drama. Especially Euripides’ *Alexandros* seems to fit our Paris reliefs. The play itself is lost, but its plot has partly survived in a papyrus containing the *hypotheses* of his plays (*cf.* note 12). Such anthologies were widely spread in the Hellenistic world, and may also have been illustrated with ‘diagnostic’ scenes.¹⁷ Therefore they were

16 Volterra inv. 227; Brunn 1870:pl. 13,28; CUV 1:no. 8.

not only suited for general literary education, but also for scenographers, and for artists.

The lack of surviving Etruscan literature has led to an *opinio communis* that it never existed. However, that is a consequence of the extinction of the language. Now there is more and more evidence for the fact that theatrical performances were also given in Etruria, and that both live theatre and illustrated books had a great impact on the motifs of Etruscan cinerary urns (cf. Nielsen 1993:341-45). Many, especially Volterranean urns, even show architectural decorations, which happen to correspond to fragments found in the excavations of a stage building at Arezzo (Maetzke 1999). Etruscans had for long had professional performances as part of propitiatory rites, including funerals, and Greek-style tragedies may well have constituted 'modernized' versions of old-age funerary games. The peak of theatrical motifs in funerary art was reached in the second century BC, parallel to the creation of Roman drama and probably of Etruscan drama as well.¹⁸

The subject matter of Greek tragedies contained many motifs suitable for funerary purposes, and here we come to the second level of interpretation, regarding the function of the relief in the funerary context. In the case of the story of Paris, it may well have been Paris' only apparent death, his narrow rescues and his 'returns to life' that secured the Recognition motif its success in funerary art. Furthermore, soothsaying, prophecies, and the fulfilment of predictions are important elements in these scenes. With their renowned expertise in the art of divination, the Etruscans were capable of not only comprehending but of emphasizing the complicated time patterns in the Greek tragedies against the background of their own culture. For example, a few Volterranean urns show by Cassandra's side a man wearing a hat with an *apex* (Fig. 7).¹⁹ This is an ambiguous figure: the *haruspex*' costume included age-old elements going back to shepherds' clothing.²⁰ He might just be the shepherd summoned to testify to Paris' real identity as the royal prince Alexandros. On the other hand, the *apex* of his hat and his dignified figure are so clearly indicated that we have to take him as a *haruspex*. This makes the element of divination very clear to the audience.

17 Gentili 1979:18ff. For illuminated books, refs. in Small 1999:568 n. 60, Maggiani 2000:17 n. 17 (also Hellenistic paintings in Rome).

18 Nielsen 1993:esp. 322-24, tables 1-2; the highest percentages of Greek mythological subjects on Volterranean urns were 53,8 in the mid-second century BC, but their quantities continued to be very high down to early first century BC. On the relationships between Roman tragedy literature and Volterranean urn motifs, cf. La Penna 1977. At Chiusi the most varied repertoire of tragedy motifs in funerary art appeared earlier in the 2nd cent. BC than at Volterra.

19 Volterra 236; Brunn 1870:pl. 12:25, Steuernagel 1998:pl. 25:1. Another example, Brunn 1870:pl. 14:29.

20 Maggiani 1989. The Chiusine urns with divination scenes are from the same period, early 2nd cent. BC, as some lid figures represented as *haruspices*.

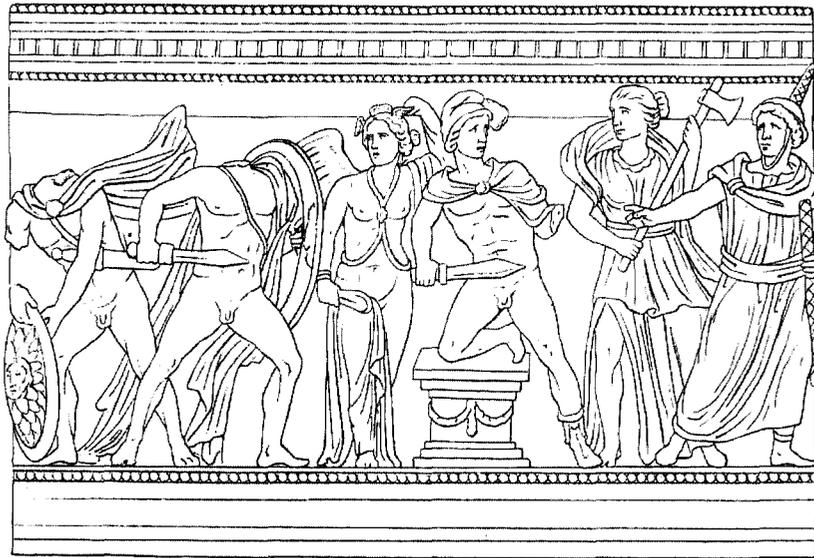


Fig. 7. Urn relief with the Recognition of Paris, late 2nd cent. BC. Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 236 (Brunn 1870:pl. 12,25)

The aspect of divination and the cyclical concept of time among the Etruscans may have been stressed in funerary art²¹ more strongly than in other artistic fields, because of the consolation and hope it gives to the bereaved: human life and death made part of a bigger whole.

One more interpretational level might have been implied by choosing the same hero to appear at three different ages: his 'hidden state' as a child, his return amongst the living as a youth, and his manhood may have referred to rites of initiation. The initiates to Dionysiac (and other) mysteries went through stages of separation, transition, and reincorporation into society, rites whose ultimate scope was to secure the final transition, from mortality to immortality (refs. in Hoffmann 1997:121-26). There is a lot of evidence from contemporary Etruria, especially from Chiusi, of the cult of Dionysos, both from the world of the living and from the funerary context.

The last, 'eternal' stage is shown on the lid of the urn, albeit combined with retrospective features from the life of the deceased (Fig. 1). Here Aule Vetana is represented as a middle-aged man with balding head and wrinkled forehead, but holding his head in an almost triumphant posture. Whether pointing to past or future triumphs, he wears a golden oak-leaf wreath on his head. The rest of the

21 The most well-known example is the François tomb, e.g. Coarelli 1996:138-78 (reprint from 1983), Brilliant 1987:30-42, pls. 2-3.

figure points to his new, immortal status as a heroic banqueter in the Afterlife—his nude upper body, the garland round his neck, and especially the gilded *kantharos*, Dionysos' attribute *par excellence*.

The idea of considering the story of Paris, his 'deaths and returns,' as a metaphor of the funerary aspects of the Dionysiac mysteries would probably not have entered my mind without Herbert Hoffmann's inspiring volume *Sotades* (1997), and his paper given at the first 'Myth and Symbol' seminar at Tromsø, containing a perceptive analysis of Sotades' white-ground *kylix* in London.²² The painter has succeeded in depicting the complicated and enigmatic story of Polyidus and Glaucus with a few, masterly chosen elements. Glaucus is wrapped in a dark cloak and sitting on the ground in a squatting posture—not quite unlike our boy. Although in different circumstances, both figures convey the idea of death which proved to be only apparent (*cf.* note 10).

The motif of the squatting boy serves as a link to the second part of this paper. Such figures do appear here and there in Etruscan art, as the small figure entirely wrapped in a black cloak, apparently sleeping, in the *Tomba degli Auguri* at Tarquinia, from about 530 BC (*Etruscan Painting* 1985:pl.19). I have no precise suggestions as to how this figure should be interpreted. At any rate, the painting had been hidden for centuries in a closed, underground tomb chamber, before our Chiusine boy was created.

Unlike most Etruscan funerary art, Greek funerary monuments were exposed in the open air. Although many of them had been pulled down and reused as building blocks for the city walls and elsewhere already in Antiquity, at least something must have been visible also in Hellenistic Athens. If, for example, a second-century Etruscan visitor happened to come to Athens or somewhere else in the Greek and Hellenistic world, he must have been impressed by the monuments he saw. Whatever the channel of transmission, many of the Greek motifs came to belong to a common figurative repertoire over vast areas. Many of the single elements borrowed from Greek art reappear in later times in varying contexts (*cf.* Maggiani 2000).

It is a paradox that in their choice of subject for funerary reliefs, the Etruscans in the Hellenistic period were more 'Greek' than the Greeks themselves, and that continued also in the Roman imperial sarcophagus reliefs. Subjects from Greek mythology constitute the largest single group of motifs on Etruscan urns, especially abundant on the expensive and finely carved alabaster urns (*cf.* note 18). By contrast, the cheaper tufa urns show endless variations of farewell scenes without

22 Hoffmann 1997:120-23 (*cf.* Hoffmann 2002), followed by Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999:84-86. For analogous concepts on Volterranean red-figure *kelebai*, used as cinerary urns, see Cristofani 1997.

mythological contents, just as grave *stelai* do in Greece. The narrow shape of the Greek *stèle* does not permit large crowds of persons to be depicted, as on the Etruscan urns, but on both, persons of different ages are normally assembled. At times they look at each others, as 'real people' would do, but often they do not. The lack of visual contact may tell us that some of them are not present in reality, but only in the minds of the bereaved. The small family groups of three different generations at the most—in short, the three principal age groups in society—convey the idea of family cohesion and continuity, in spite of the loss (Bergemann 1997). More symbolism than that is not common on the Attic grave reliefs.

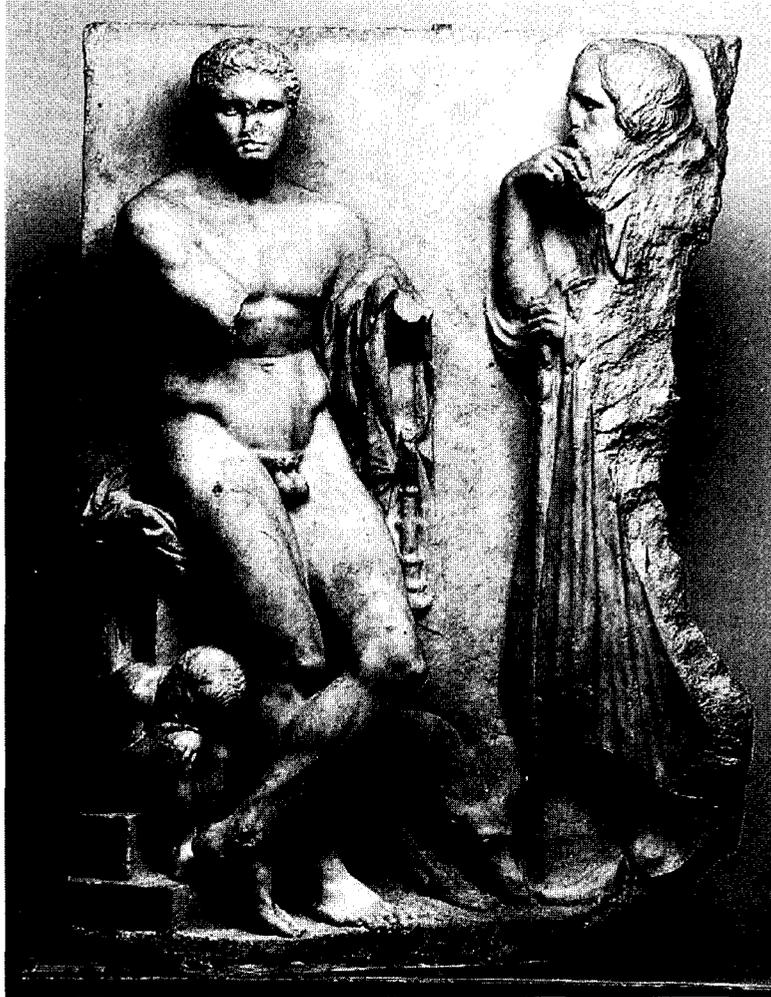


Fig. 8. Attic funerary relief found in the Ilissos river bed, ca. 340-320 BC, Athens NM 869 (photo Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens 4673)

However, I wonder whether there might be a few exceptions. Among the enormous quantities of Attic grave *stelai*, the well-known *naiskos* relief found in the Ilissos river bed appears somewhat different (Fig. 8).²³ This is of course partly due to its exceptionally high artistic qualities: the ‘Ilissos sculptor’ has mostly been regarded a talented follower of Skopas or Lysippos, active after the middle of the fourth century.

There is nothing peculiar as such in the relief: three male persons of different ages and a dog. The small dowel holes on both sides of the heads of the old man and the younger one for inserting wreaths indicate that the relief did commemorate both these persons, at least when both were dead (the holes may have been added after that had happened). Unfortunately, the frame and eventual inscriptions are missing, so we do not know their identity, nor the precise idea behind this monument.

The customary interpretation is the matter-of-fact, biographical one: a young hunter with his hunting club and his dog; at his feet his small *pais* who has wept himself to sleep; the old father standing in deep sorrow, leaning on his stick.

But is this the only level of interpretation? I think that the sculptor tried to make himself very clear, sprinkling clues about his intentions all over the relief, to be ‘read’ on another level than the customary one, at least by a narrow circle of connoisseurs. This suggestion may, of course, result in yet another anachronistic invention of ‘hidden agendas.’²⁴

Why is the old father not of the normal, vigorous type but one who rather resembles a philosopher?²⁵ We are here dealing with a period ranging between 340-320 BC, *i.e.*, relatively soon after Plato’s death in 348/347 BC, on which occasion Speusippos wrote the well-known epigram, speaking of the separation of his body lying in the ground, and of his godlike soul among the blessed ones (quoted by Himmelmann-Wildschütz 1956:26). Nor has the father’s gesture the customary air of nostalgic sorrow. He rather seems puzzled, as if pondering a philosophical enigma; in fact, his gesture is the conventional one for meditation (Neumann 1965:123). And, since he is gazing at the youth, he is probably pondering the whys of the youth’s premature death.²⁶

23 Athens NM 869: Clairmont 1993:no. 2.950, discussed on pp. 812-21, 821-24, with many references, of which most relevant in this connection are perhaps Himmelmann-Wildschütz 1956, Neumann 1965:124, 131 fig. 63; further, *e.g.* Panofsky 1993:23, fig. 40, Moreno 1994:70-80, Bergemann 1997:164 no. 300, pls. 94,4, 106,2, Himmelmann 1999:28-29.

24 Admittedly, the following suggestion would be less controversial in the Neo-Platonic context of Renaissance art.

25 Several centuries later, in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD, the type had an impact even on how young persons were portrayed: Ewald 1999.

26 That the old man survived the youth is the customary interpretation. However, the cloak pulled high up his neck, might mean that he is already ‘invisible,’ *i.e.* dead. But here I may be making an incorrect projection from Etruscan iconography.

The *pais* squatting by the hunter's feet, apparently on his master's tombstone, may not actually be there at all. Viewed from the left, at an angle, we see that his eyes are open, but otherwise he makes himself as small and invisible as possible, conveying the idea of 'being and not being.' The theme has been varied in another *stele*, from Kerameikos,²⁷ clearly influenced by the Ilissos *stele*. There the *pais* is even smaller; in real life an infant of that size would hardly be able to assist the athlete by holding his sporting equipment. The 'mood' on this *stele* is, however, more conventional and sentimental.

On the Ilissos relief, the youth is represented in as big a contrast to the small boy and the old father as possible. While the boy looks away, and the father looks straight at the youth, the young man himself is looking right out of the relief, towards the spectator, with a calm and 'self-possessed' expression, and in a casually relaxed posture, which emphasizes the perfection of his naked body. We do not know, what he really looked like, but perhaps his physical perfection is only a metaphor for his supposed mental capacities.

Since the organizer of the present seminar has stressed the importance of discussion, I would like to ask, whether it would be quite unthinkable that we would not only be dealing with a 'heroised, immortalised' youth with his nearest ones, but with a deeper, philosophical reflection on the human life span? The young man would represent the peak of human perfection, while the beings at his feet would depict his way to that stage: before being illuminated and shaped by philosophy, he had been like a sleeping child or a searching hound. His old father—perhaps himself a philosopher?—had passed that stage of perfection, but is shown here as the one who is asking the questions of life and death. Or, is the sculptor making an anti-philosophical statement about the limits of human cognition?²⁸

Bringing the two otherwise quite unrelated reliefs into the discussion on the nature of myth and symbol dealt with in this volume, I would like to conclude that the Etruscan representation of a Greek myth, although by 'affective' means, deals with markedly cognitive questions of categorising and structuring the world. And that the quite unmythical, Greek relief, although 'cognitive' in its basic conception, is able to pull on highly affective strings in the viewer's mind.

27 Athens NM 871: Clairmont 1993:no. 2.294, Moreno 1994:72 fig. 80, 80-81; good pictures of both reliefs, Himmelmann 1999:26-27. A third squatting boy on a Thasian relief, Clairmont 1993:no. 2.960.

28 Philosophers did not share the creed of a higher existence of the dead, but there seemed to be a change in the very period we are dealing with (*cf.* Johansen 1951:128).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bergemann, Johannes 1997. *Demos und Thanatos. Untersuchungen zum Wertsystem der Polis im Spiegel der attischen Grabreliefs des 4. Jahrhunderts v.Chr. und zur Funktion der gleichzeitigen Grabbauten* (München)
- Brilliant, Richard 1987. *Narrare per immagini. Racconti di storie nell'arte etrusca e romana* (Firenze)
- Brunn, Enrico 1870. *I rilievi delle urne etrusche*, vol. 1 (Roma)
- Clairmont, Christoph W. 1993. *Classical Attic tombstones*, vol. 2 (Kilchberg)
- Coarelli, Filippo 1996. *Revixit ars* (Roma)
- Coles, R.A. 1974. *A new Oxyrhynchus papyrus. The Hypothesis of Euripides' Alexandros*. BICS suppl. 32 (London)
- Cristofani, Mauro 1997. 'Itinerari iconografici nella ceramografia volterrana,' in *Aspetti della cultura di Volterra etrusca, Atti del XIX convegno di Studi Etruschi ed Italici, Volterra 1995* (Firenze):175-92
- CUV 1. M. Cristofani et al. (eds.), *Urne volterrane 1. I complessi tombali*. Corpus delle urne etrusche di età ellenistica 1975:1 (Firenze)
- CUV 2:2. G. Cateni (ed.), *Urne volterrane. 2. Il Museo Guarnacci*, 2. Corpus delle urne etrusche di età ellenistica 1986:2.2 (Pisa)
- d'Agostino, Bruno and Luca Cerchiali 1999. *Il mare, la morte, l'amore. Gli Etruschi, i Greci e l'immagine* (Roma)
- Epos greco in Occidente (L')* 1980. *L'epos greco in Occidente. Atti del diciannovesimo convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia (Taranto 1979)*. [1989] (Taranto)
- Etruscan Painting* 1986. S. Steingraber (ed.), *Etruscan Painting* (New York)
- Ewald, Björn Christian 1999. *Der Philosoph als Leitbild. Ikonographische Untersuchungen an römischen Sarkophagreliefs* (Mainz)
- Gentili, Bruno 1979. *Theatrical performances in the ancient world* (Amsterdam)
- Harari, Maurizio 1995. 'Ipotesi sulle regole del montaggio narrativo nella pittura vascolare etrusca,' in *Modi e funzioni del racconto mitico nella ceramica greca italica ed etrusca dal VI al IV secolo a.C.* Atti del convegno internazionale Raito di Vietri sul Mare 1994 (Salerno):103-35
- Himmelfmann-Wildschütz, Nikolaus 1956. *Studien zum Ilissos-Relief* (München)
- Himmelfmann, Nikolaus 1999. "Aufruf zum Totengedächtnis." Zur religiösen Motivation attischer Grabreliefs,' *AW* 30,1:21-30
- Hoffmann, Herbert 1997. *Sotades. Symbols of immortality on Greek vases* (Oxford)
- . 2002. 'Focusing on the invisible. Greek myth and symbol contemplation,' in Synnøve des Bouvrie (ed.), *Myth and symbol*. Vol. I *Symbolic phenomena in ancient Greek culture* (Bergen):71-88
- Johansen, Karsten Friis 1951. *The Attic grave-reliefs of the Classical period. An essay in interpretation* (Copenhagen)
- Jouan, François 1966. *Euripide et les légendes des chants cypriens. Des origines de la guerre de Troie à l'Illiade*. Thesis (Paris)
- Körte, Gustavo 1896. *I rilievi delle urne etrusche*, vol. 2:2 (Rome and Berlin)
- La Penna, Antonio 1977. 'Funzione e interpretazione del mito nella tragedia arcaica latina,' in M. Martelli and M. Cristofani (eds.), *Caratteri dell'ellenismo nelle urne etrusche*. Atti dell'incontro di studi, Siena 1976 (Firenze):10-27
- LIMC. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zürich and München) 1981-97
- Maetzke, Guglielmo 1999. 'Castelsecco (Arezzo): una ipotesi sulla scena del teatro etrusco-italico,' in *Incontro di studi in memoria di Massimo Pallottino, Firenze 1996*. Biblioteca di Studi Etruschi 34 (Pisa and Roma):37-45
- Maggiani, Adriano 1989. 'Immagini di aruspici,' in *Secondo congresso internazionale etrusco, Firenze 1985*, Atti vol. 3 (Roma):1557-63

- . 2000. "Assassinii all'altare." Per la storia di due schemi iconografici greci in Etruria,' *Prospettiva* 100:9-18
- Mangold, Meret 2000. *Kassandra in Athen. Die Eroberung Trojas auf attischen Vasenbildern* (Berlin)
- Martelli, Marina 1994. 'Sul nome etrusco di Alexandros,' *Studi Etruschi* 60 [1995]:165-78
- Mazzoldi, Sabina 2001. *Cassandra, la vergine e l'indovina. Identità di un personaggio da Omero all'Ellenismo*. Filologia e critica 88
- Moreno, Paolo 1994. *Scultura ellenistica*, vol. 1 (Roma)
- . 2002. 'La nuova età dell'oro,' *Archeo* 18,4:98-101
- Mythe grec dans l'Italie antique (Le)* 1999. F.-H. Massa-Pairault (ed.), *Le mythe grec dans l'Italie antique. Fonction et image. Actes colloque internationale, Rome 1996* (Rome)
- Neumann, Gerhard 1965. *Gesten und Gebärden in der griechischen Kunst* (Berlin)
- Nielsen, Marjatta 1993. 'Cultural orientations in Etruria in the Hellenistic period. Greek myths and local motifs on Volterran urn reliefs,' *Acta Hyperborea* 5 (Copenhagen):319-57
- . 1996. 'Sarcophagi and cinerary urns,' in M. Moltesen and M. Nielsen (eds.), *Catalogue Etruria and central Italy 450-30 BC, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek* (Copenhagen):43-135
- . 1999a. 'Past, present, and future. The conception of time in Etruscan imagery,' in R.F. Docter and E.M. Moormann (eds.), *Proceedings of the XVth International congress of Classical archaeology, Amsterdam 1998* (Allard Pierson Series 12, Amsterdam):277-79, pl. 25:c-d.
- . 1999b. 'The conception of time among the Etruscans,' *Tijd en tijdsbeleving, Leidschrift* 14:2 (Leiden):33-45
- . Forthcoming. 'Three ages of Paris. Interpretations of Aule Vetana's urn relief at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek,' in *Aeimnestos. Miscellanea di studi per Mauro Cristofani*. Secondo supplemento a *Prospettiva* (Firenze)
- Pairault-Massa, Françoise-Hélène 1992. *Iconologia e politica nell'Italia antica. Roma, Lazio, Etruria dal VII al I secolo a.C.* Biblioteca di archeologia 18 (Milano)
- Panofsky, Erwin 1933. *Grabplastik* (Köln). Engl. ed., *Tomb Sculpture*, 1964 (New York)
- Small, Jocelyn Penny 1999. 'Time in space. Narrative in Classical art,' *Art Bulletin* 81:4:562-75
- Snell, Bruno 1937. *Euripides Alexandros und andere Strassburger Papyri mit Fragmenten griechischer Dichter*. Hermes Einzelschriften 5 (Berlin)
- Stafford, Emma J. 1993. 'Aspects of sleep in Hellenistic sculpture,' *BICS* 38 (1991-1993):105-20.
- Stansbury-O'Donnell, Mark 1999. *Pictorial narrative in Greek art* (Cambridge)
- Steuernagel, Dirk 1998. *Menschenopfer und Mord am Altar. Griechische Mythen in etruskischen Gräbern*. Palilia 3 (Wiesbaden)
- Van der Meer, Lammert Bouke 1978. *Etruscan Urns from Volterra. Studies on Mythological Representations*. I-II. Diss. Groningen (Meppel)
- . 1991. 'Iphigenia Aulidensis on Etruscan Urns from Perugia,' *Studi Etruschi* 57:119-36
- Vetri dei Cesari* 1988. D.B. Harden et al. (eds.), *Vetri dei Cesari. Exhibition catalogue Rome* (Milano)
- Viret-Bernal, Francine 1996. 'Quand les peintres exécutent une meurtrière. L'image de Clytemnestre dans la céramique attique,' in O. Cavalier (ed.), *Silence et fureur. La femme et le mariage en Grèce. Les antiquités grecques du Musée Calvet* (Avignon): 289-301 (in English, in A.O. Koloski-Ostrow and C.L. Lyons (eds.), *Naked Truths. Women, sexuality, and gender in classical art and archaeology* [London and New York 1997]:289-301)