

9



NARRATIVE

Timeline

Narrative and Artistic Style

Narrative Time and Space

Viewing Context

Art and Literature

Choice of Mood and Moment

Symbolic and Universal Aspects of Narrative

Textbox: Interpretation and Information Theory

References

Further Reading

A History of Greek Art, First Edition. Mark D. Stansbury-O'Donnell.
© 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Published 2015 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

TIMELINE

	Sculpture	Pottery
800–700		MG II skyphos from Eleusis, 770
700–625/600		Eleusis amphora, 670–650 [6.15] Chigi olpe, 650–640 [6.11]
625/600–480	Temple C at Selinus/Selinunte, 550–530 [8.6] Siphnian Treasury, 530–525 [8.1–8.2]	François Vase, 570 [8.23] Attic BF kylix with Kirke, 550 Attic BF amphora by Exekias, 540–535
480–400	Temple of Zeus at Olympia, 470–457 Parthenon frieze, 442–438 [1.1, 10.15]	Attic RF hydria by Kleophrades Painter, 480 Attic RF krater by Niobid Painter, 460 Attic RF skyphos by Penelope Painter, 450–440 Attic RF pelike by Pronomos Painter, 410–400 Cabiran skyphos, 410–400
400–330	Monument of Dexileos, 394/393 [12.12]	Lucanian RF pelike by Choephoroi Painter, 350 Paestan RF krater by Asteas, 350–340 [12.21]
330–30	Tomb relief from Taras/Taranto, 300–250 Great Altar of Zeus at Pergamon, 180–150	

As we noted in the last chapter, Greek narrative pictures became more common during the sixth century and were widely distributed throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea areas. “Reading” these stories, however, is different from reading a text. Poets and writers can explain a sequence of actions in minute detail; the *Iliad* covers just over two weeks of the decade-long Trojan War, although it recounts many other earlier events through speeches and descriptions. Most pictorial narratives are a single image that captures only some of the story’s action and calls upon the viewer to fill in the missing parts. The descriptive capacity of images, however, has its own narrative power that can appeal across barriers of language and culture. It is one thing to describe a battle, but to see the agony of the defeated or the perfect body of the hero creates an engagement with the viewer that is different from a text and partly explains the power of film as a narrative medium today.

There are several critical challenges for the modern viewer in deciphering an ancient Greek narrative. First, many ancient Greek stories and their variations do not survive in literary accounts. Some narratives were composed and preserved, like the *Iliad*, but many more poems and written accounts are known only from fragments or are lost entirely. Whereas we depend upon these surviving texts as a source for our knowledge of Greek narrative, the Greeks did not. Most people experienced epic poems like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or dramas like the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides as performances and did not consult texts. Oral traditions, tales told by parents and grandparents or stories told by guides at sanctuaries, were a fundamental part of both individual and collective knowledge. Furthermore, Greek literature did not focus on the creation of new stories and characters, but reworked or elaborated upon the stories that the culture had shared for centuries or adapted narratives from other cultures. Like the poets, artists rarely invented completely new narrative images, but drew upon the same sources as the poets. They could repeat or adapt a common visual formula, introduce a new variable or twist that might capture a viewer’s attention, or develop a new scene and their own version of a story.

The second challenge when looking at narrative pictures is that the ancient Greeks shared a visual language that we can only partially recover. While today many people can recognize and decode a sign like the Apple computer logo without effort, contemporary students of Greek art do not have that shared cultural experience of ancient art to identify figures and stories without effort. By examining and comparing numerous examples of a scene, however, we can decode some of the visual language with a degree of certainty. For example, we have seen several representations of the Gorgon Medusa in the past few chapters and of Perseus attacking her (see **Figure 6.15, page 144**; **Figure 6.23, page 149**; **Figure 8.3, page 185**; **Figure 8.4, page 186**; **Figure 8.5, page 187**; **Figure 8.6, page 188**). Even with variations in detail, some features, such as Medusa’s face, the use of a sword to behead someone while turning away, and the flight with the head as a trophy, permit quick recognition of the story. As we see in these examples, both protagonists do not even need to be present for recognition of the scene, nor is the presence of some other characters such as Athena, Hermes, Chrysaor, or Pegasus necessary. Greek artists and viewers shared this visual language, which allowed a single image to evoke recollection of an entire story.

In this chapter we will consider not only the story being represented in an image, but also the different ways in which narrative pictures can interact with the viewer. Having seen the development of a more naturalistic style of representation during the archaic period, we will first consider the impact that style has upon a narrative image. We will then observe the various strategies that artists used to deal with action in time and place, fundamental elements of any story. Finally, we will explore the role of the viewer in a pictorial narrative, consider the viewing context, the choice of narrative moment, and narratives that are more universalizing in theme and call upon the viewer to contribute specificity.

NARRATIVE AND ARTISTIC STYLE

We can broadly define a pictorial narrative as a picture of an action that leads to a change in the situation of the participants. A mythological battle scene, such as the gods and the giants fighting on the Siphnian Treasury (**Figure 9.1**), the Gigantomachy, fulfills that definition. The Giants, children of Gaia (Earth) and Uranus described in literature sometimes as monsters and sometimes as warriors, challenged the Olympian gods for supremacy. With the aid of a mortal, Herakles, the gods were able to defeat the giants. In art, the story is usually shown as a duel between one or two gods and opposing giants, but on a long frieze like the Siphnian Treasury we see a series of interlocking fights. In this section, we see Dionysos with his leopard skin behind a chariot driven by Themis; Dionysos and a giant are aiming spears at each other, while the lion pulling the chariot mauls a second giant. Ahead of the chariot Apollo and Artemis draw arrows at a triad of giants; in the background a fourth giant runs away while looking backward, perhaps at Dionysos and Themis. Another giant lays dead on the ground. The dead body shows that the battle has been going on for a while, but by showing one giant dead and another fleeing, the artist indicates that while the battle is still raging at the moment, the gods have the advantage and will be victorious.

The ability of an archaic artist to depict a complex composition, show space through the overlapping of the figures into receding planes, and vary the details of the actions makes visual narratives of the seventh and sixth centuries far more effective than scenes from the Geometric period. If we look at another combat scene on a skyphos found in a grave at Eleusis and dating to *c.* 770 BCE, we can see two pairs of warriors fighting (**Figure 9.2**). The pair on the right has an archer in front and a spearman behind taking aim at their opponents. On the left side there is a second archer in front, but the warrior behind him holds some type of large pole, perhaps an epic weapon like the spear of Achilles that was made from a tree trunk and could only be thrown by Achilles himself. In the middle of the picture lie two figures set at an angle who are likely corpses that the fighting warriors are trying either to rescue or to strip of their armor. There is no indication that this is a mythological picture, lacking clear signs such as the inscriptions and attributes on the Siphnian Treasury, but like the Gigantomachy scene, it does show forceful actions that have had and will have consequences.

As we saw in the discussion of Chapters 4 and 6, the Geometric style, unlike the archaic, does not allow for detail or specificity of action, and this problem has led to debates about the



9.1 North frieze from the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi, *c.* 530–525 BCE. 25¼ in (64 cm). Delphi Museum. Gigantomachy. Photo: Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.



9.2 Middle Geometric II Attic skyphos from Eleusis, c. 770 BCE. Battle over fallen warriors. 2½ in (6.4 cm). Eleusis, Archaeological Museum 990. Photo: Hermann Wagner. D-DAI-ATH-Eleusis-512A. All rights reserved.

existence of mythological narrative during this period. It is possible to “read” some Geometric pictures as mythological narratives, but there remains uncertainty as to whether a specific story rather than a universal situation is represented. It took the development of a more intricate style in both sculpture and painting for artists to show narratives that were unambiguously specific. Whether or not an image is mythological is not the same, however, as whether it is a narrative. For example, the battle scene on the Chigi olpe (see **Figure 6.11**, page 141) is more complex and detailed in its action than the Eleusis skyphos, and has a variety of actions spanning a range of moments in time similar to the later Siphnian Treasury. For example, at the far left of the frieze a warrior is still putting on his armor. The last three warriors in the phalanx have longer strides than those ahead of them, showing that they are rushing up to join in the rank. At the head of the group, the warriors march in tight, rhythmic formation, ready to meet their opponents. Viewing the frieze from left to right, one can see unfold the initial response to the call to battle and then the subsequent joining and locking in formation. It is an effective representation of a battle and easily as complex as the Gigantomachy on the Siphnian Treasury, but there is no sign that it is a mythological or specific scene. Nevertheless, as a story of battle, it is quite an effective narrative.

We will discuss these more universalizing narratives like the Chigi olpe further at the end of this chapter, but for now we can turn to a late fifth-century representation of the Gigantomachy to see how changes in style over the century showing movement and space affect a narrative. On a late fifth-century pelike linked to the Pronomos Painter, we see three duels (**Figure 9.3**). In the center top is Ares, who has struck his spear through the shield of a giant, who grasps its point. To either side are the Dioskouroi (the Gemini twins), one on horseback and one on foot, fighting other giants. The scene is set in a rocky, three-dimensional landscape, with the god and heroes on the high ground attacking downward. The giant on the left has collapsed under the weight of the assault, while the one in the middle is being driven back and the two on the right are attempting a counterattack. The body posture of the nude youth and his action suggest that he is changing his position tactically, giving ground slightly in order to counter the attack of two giants. The picture, then, allows one to see the narrative as figures moving through space in three dimensions, rather than simply moving two-dimensionally across a shallow stage like the Siphnian Treasury. We also see convincing back and three-quarter views of the figures that reinforce this sense of the picture as a three-dimensional world. The greater naturalism in the rendering of muscles and anatomy conveys the fighters’ physical effort, and the perspectival consistency of the face and eye provides a sense of their gaze and focus. The greater range and subtlety of actions make each duel different and the overall action more life-like and varied than archaic narrative.



9.3 Attic red-figure pelike near the Pronomos Painter, end 5th cent. BCE. 16½ in (42 cm). Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1333. Gigantomachy. Photo: National Archaeological Museum, Athens (Giannis Patrikianos) © Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports/Archaeological Receipts Fund.

monoscenic narrative
narrative picture in which the action occurs at a single time and place

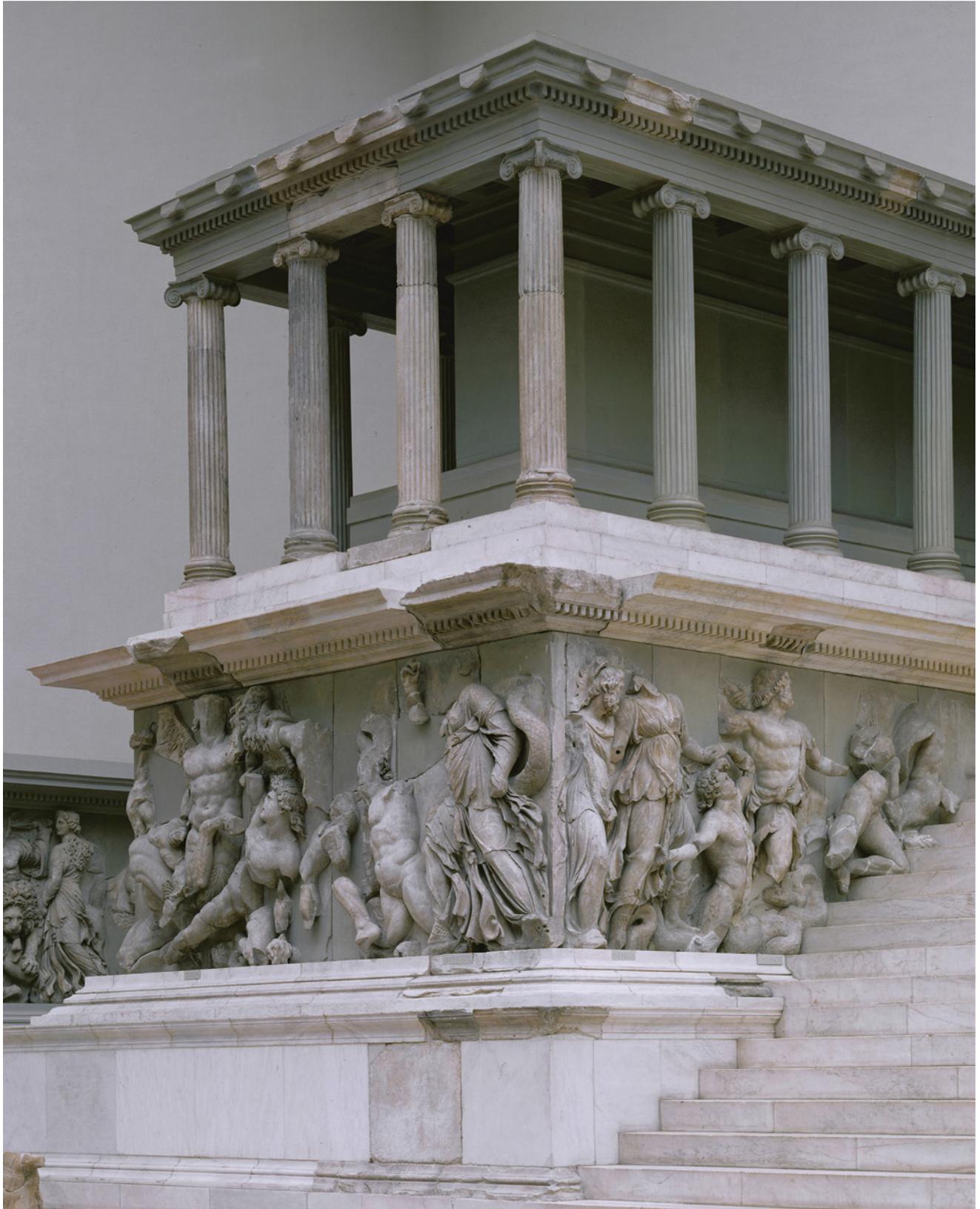
makes the Gigantomachy more dramatic, violent, and imposing than the other two gigantomachies, even though the basic storyline is similar.

NARRATIVE TIME AND SPACE

As we have seen, a narrative needs to suggest a sequence of actions in time and space. The place does not have to be geographically specific, but the viewer needs to understand how the figures move through space to interact with each other. This can be simple, as with two warriors on a simple ground-line, but it can also be more complex, as we saw in the classical Gigantomachy (**Figure 9.3**). A time sequence is more challenging. In movies or videos, time is built into the experience of the medium, so that story time and viewer time run together, although not always synchronously. For Greek artists, multiple pictures or complex compositions could provide an element of storytelling time like movies or cartoons. However, most narrative pictures are single panels, leaving an artist the choice between showing a snapshot of time and action or cheating time and space to show multiple actions or moments.

An amphora by Exekias depicting the story of the suicide of Ajax is an example of the snapshot approach, called a **monoscenic narrative**: action taking place at a single time and place (**Figure 9.5**). We have already seen on the shield band from Olympia (see **Figure 8.16, page 198**) a very late moment in the story, when the Greeks discover the body of Ajax impaled on his sword. In that panel, the

We can skip further ahead to look at a Hellenistic version of the same story from the second century BCE. A monumental Gigantomachy filled the frieze of the Great Altar of Zeus at Pergamon (**Figure 9.4**). Here the figures are over life-size and cover the three sides and the wings flanking the front stairs, almost 120 total meters of frieze with close to 100 figures (see the view of the altar in **Figure 14.6, page 352**). On the front side, we see at the right end Amphitrite moving leftward away from the stairs, subduing a giant falling away from her; on the other side is the god Triton, who moves rightward toward Amphitrite and strikes down a second giant between them. In the section of the frieze along the stairs we see at the corner the bearded Nereus, god of the sea, who supports a goddess in front of him, probably his wife Doris, although the inscription is missing, moving toward the right (upstairs). Doris moves rightward (upstairs) and has grabbed the hair of a giant who has fallen to his knees; she pulls on the head so that the giant's body arches back violently. His eyes are deeply set in his skull and convincingly roll upward; with his open mouth and slack hand trying to pull her wrist away, we see a figure that is expressing an emotional anguish and pain to match the physical trauma his body is experiencing. The figures are carved in very deep relief, and many of the anatomical features, especially the bulging muscles, are exaggerated to increase the sense of exertion and movement. We will discuss the Hellenistic "baroque" style in more detail in Chapter 14, but one can readily see that this style



9.4 Frieze from the Great Altar of Zeus at Pergamon, c. 180–150 BCE. Height of frieze: 7 ft 6½ in (2.3 m). Berlin, Pergamonmuseum. Gigantomachy. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.



9.5 Attic black-figure amphora attributed to Exekias, c. 540–535 BCE. Height of picture: $6\frac{1}{4}$ in (15.8 cm). Collection of the Museum of Boulogne-sur-Mer 558. Suicide of Ajax. Photo © Museum Service Boulogne-sur-Mer.



9.6 Attic black-figure cup, c. 550 BCE. 5¼ in (13.2 cm). Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 99.518. Kirke, Odysseus, and his sailors. Photograph © 2014 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

action is nearly finished except for the decision about what type of funeral to give Ajax. In his picture, Exekias has chosen an earlier moment when Ajax is planting his sword and patting the sand to hold it in place. The palm tree signifies a beach location, and it has been suggested that its bent form perhaps symbolizes the hero's sorrow (Hurwit 1982, 198 and 1983; contra Madden 1983). Certainly his distinctive and unusual action leads one to recall from our knowledge of the story and other pictures that he will throw himself on the sword and die at a moment in the future.

By showing this moment, Exekias makes us think even more about events leading up to this scene. Since Ajax has already removed his armor, we know that he is not going to battle. We can then ponder the reasons for this: a dispute over who was to get the armor of the dead Achilles, Ajax's proud anger at the award going to the eloquent Odysseus in a vote of the army, his attempt to kill the leaders of the Greeks in retaliation, and the madness brought on Ajax by Athena that caused him to kill a flock of sheep instead. We now see the moment when he has regained his senses and takes what he feels is the only honorable course of action left to him. None of these events is in the picture, but the armor cues us that he is no longer the warrior who led the Greeks in battle against the Trojans and rescued the body of Achilles, and reminds us of the prize of Achilles's armor that he lost. Exekias's style is not sufficiently naturalistic to suggest emotion and thought through Ajax's facial expression, but the choice of action, gesture, pose, and objects in the picture presents a narrative that truly deserves the label tragic, even if the dramatic medium of tragedy itself had not yet been developed.

Artists can also include in a composition objects or actions that belong to different places or times to make more direct reference to the passage of narrative time. In a well-known example in the scholarly literature, a black-figure kylix in Boston shows the story of Odysseus and Kirke (**Figure 9.6**). As we know the story from *Odyssey* 10.222–385, Odysseus arrived at an island and some of his men, led by Eurylochos, went to seek hospitality at the home of Kirke. She welcomed them with a drugged drink, and then turned them into pigs with a touch of her wand. Eurylochos escaped and ran back to tell Odysseus. The hero, after eating an herb that Hermes gave him, went to the house and drank the potion, but did not turn into an animal. After threatening Kirke, he went to bed with her. Eventually, Kirke turned the sailors back into their human form and they, along with Odysseus, stayed on the island for a while before continuing the journey home.

synoptic narrative

narrative picture that includes figures, actions, or objects that belong to different moments of a narrative

progressive narrative

narrative image in which time progresses as one moves from one part of the image to another, but without repetition of any characters

panoramic narrative

narrative image in which different actions take place at the same time but in different places

Looking at the picture, we see in the center a nude Kirke mixing her potion in a wine cup in her left hand. In front of her is a figure with a human body and a boar's head, a sailor who has already drunk the mixture and is transforming into an animal. Behind him are two other sailors who also have animal legs in place of arms, having drunk the potion earlier. These hybrid sailor-animals differ from the pigs in the *Odyssey* account, but are an effective visual cue, reminding the viewer of their metamorphosis (Davies 1986). At the far right, a completely human figure runs away, the sailor Eurylochos. On the left side of the cup we see two more hybrids, one with a lion's head and human arms running away, and another boar-sailor behind Kirke. In between is a figure charging with drawn sword, who could only be Odysseus. This, however, introduces a narrative anomaly, in that Eurylochos has not yet got away to tell Odysseus what has happened. Thus, actions from two different times of the story are shown in the picture, a pastiche called **synoptic** narration. This inconsistency of time and place is not unusual, and is a way for artists to compensate for the limitations of the medium and object in showing time and action. We have already seen examples of it in the Temple of Artemis at Korfu, where Medusa holds her posthumous children (see **Figure 8.3, page 185**), and the amphora from Eleusis in which the supposedly unconscious Polyphemos is seated with a cup still in his hand while Odysseus drives a stake into his eye (see **Figure 6.15, page 144**). It is much less common after the archaic period, but examples can be found in all periods.

More complex or larger-scale pictures can introduce multiple moments or places to show more of a story. In a long frieze, for example, the early stage of an action can be shown at one end and a later moment at another without having to repeat any figures. This **progressive narrative** type we have already discussed in the battle scene on the Chigi olpe (see **Figure 6.11, page 141**). Viewing the scene from left to right, we can see a call to arms, the formation of the rank, the march forward, and then finally the engagement in battle. The Parthenon frieze uses the same type of approach, with youths assembling their horses to prepare for a procession on the west side of the frieze, the cavalry riding forward in procession on the north and south sides (see **Figure 1.1, page 2**), and the ending presentation of the peplos to Athena on the east side (see **Figure 10.15, page 250**). Whether or not this is a unified subject or several, as we shall discuss in the next chapter, as one walked along the Parthenon the actions of the narrative would unfold in time with the viewer's progress.

One could also arrange a frieze that showed multiple actions taking place simultaneously but in different places, a **panoramic narrative**. A red-figure hydria by the Kleophrades painter, for example, shows five scenes of the *Iliupersis* on a frieze stretching all the way around the shoulder, making it impossible to see the entire composition at once (**Figure 9.7**). The center scene shows Neoptolemos, the son of Achilles, about to strike Priam, the king of Troy, with his sword. The king's grandson, Astyanax, lies dead in his lap and blood flows from wounds on both. Priam sits on an altar, which would be the household altar in the palace, grasping his head in a gesture of mourning. To the left, the warrior Ajax, son of Oileus (or the lesser Ajax to distinguish him from the other, greater Ajax who committed suicide), strides to our right and grabs a nude woman clutching a statue. This is the rape of Cassandra, the daughter of Priam, who had sought refuge in the Temple of Athena. Out of sight on the left one would see Aeneas fleeing Troy with his father and son. To the right of Priam, we see a woman armed only with a pestle attacking a fully armed Greek warrior, who cowers before her attack. She is usually identified as Andromache, the wife of Hektor and mother of Astyanax, whose name literally means "man-fighter." To the far right one would see two warriors helping up a seated old woman. They are the sons of Theseus, Akamas and Damophon, rescuing their grandmother Aithra, who had been forced to serve as Helen's slave.

All of these scenes of Troy's fall could have occurred at the same time narratively, but they clearly took place in different locations. Turning the vase to view one scene after another, one gets a more vivid impression than in a lengthy poem of the scale and scope of the carnage in the destruction of a



9.7 Attic red-figure hydria attributed to the Kleophrades Painter, c. 480 BCE. 16½ in (42 cm). Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico 2422. *Iliupersis* scenes. Photo: Fotografica Foglia; Credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

city and its people. Other versions of this panoramic strategy can also be seen in the east frieze of the Siphnian Treasury, where Achilles and Memnon fight at Troy while the gods debate their fate on Mount Olympus (see **Figure 8.1, page 183**).

If there is sufficient room on a monument or object, one could also show multiple scenes that repeat one or more characters, with each action set at a different time (and possibly location). The interior of a mid-fifth-century cup shows six deeds of Theseus in the circular frieze, and a seventh in the central tondo (**Figure 9.8**). In each case Theseus is repeated, signaling that we have a new major action at a different time than the scenes on either side. Five of the scenes take place on his way to Athens, while the scene with the bull of Marathon in the bottom of the cup takes place after his arrival, as does the Minotaur episode in the tondo. Since each of his opponents is different, there is a sequence of both time and place on this cup. The figures in the scenes overlap, and this lack of visual division gives the name **continuous** narration to this composition. Turning to the metopes of the Athenian Treasury from the last chapter (see **Figure 8.7, page 189**), we find some of the same scenes, but now each composition is framed in its own panel. This approach with separate framed scenes is called **cyclical** narration, but features the same approach to character, time, and space as continuous narrative.

As we have seen, there are objects and buildings featuring multiple scenes that do not belong to a single story but are from different narratives. The metopes of Temple C in Selinus/Selinunte depicted a variety of gods and heroes, some in narrative scenes and others not (see **Figure 8.6, page 188**), but the thematic connection between them is debated, as we saw in the last chapter. The narratives on one side of the François Vase depict stories connected with members of Achilles's family (see **Figure 8.23, page 203**). From top to bottom these are the Calydonian boar hunt, featuring his father Peleus next to Meleager going head to head with the boar; the funeral games hosted by Achilles for his dead friend/lover Patroklos; the wedding of Achilles's parents, Peleus and the goddess Thetis; and finally Achilles attacking the Trojan prince Troilos at the beginning of the Trojan War.

continuous narrative
narrative image in which multiple scenes are set in a continuous frieze or picture, repeating some of the participants from one scene to the next

cyclical narrative
narrative image in which multiple scenes are set in separate panels or pictures, repeating some of the participants from one scene to the next

9.8 Attic red-figure kylix attributed to the Kodros Painter, c. 440–430 BCE. 13 in (33 cm) diameter. London, British Museum E84. Deeds of Theseus: clockwise from top: Kerkyon, Prokrustes, Skiron, Marathonian Bull, Sinis, and Kremmyon Sow; tondo: Minotaur. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.



The theme here could be the heroic pedigree and accomplishments of Achilles, which would be suitable for a wedding reception, as has been suggested for this krater (Stewart 1983). There are many pictures on objects, however, that have no apparent connection, or only the vaguest link, such as “gods” or “heroes.” The scene on the other side of Exekias’s amphora showing the suicide of Ajax, for example, has two youths departing on a chariot with onlookers, which has no discernible direct connection to the other side of the pot.

When looking at pictorial narratives, we have to think about the single picture and how it structures action, time, and place. We can then consider additional pictures or scenes on the object or building and how they connect to each other narratively, thematically, or not at all.

VIEWING CONTEXT

Narrative pictures do not exist in isolation but as part of an artwork that exists within a context. The physical properties of an artwork impose conditions on what a viewer can see at one time and the order in which one sees other parts. What someone is doing, and where, while looking at one or more pictures also affects the viewer. In this section we will consider the potential effect of context on a viewer’s experience of a narrative.

First, we shall consider the function of an object and its physical interaction with the viewer. For example, the kylix with the scene of Kirke and Odysseus (see Figure 9.6) is for drinking wine. The drinker would hold the cup by the foot or handle, probably below eye level like the symposiasts in

Figure 5.20 (page 119) or Figure 5.21 (page 120). In this position, one could not see the entire picture, only its upper section. Only when the cup is empty could one readily hold it up to view the picture more clearly, either before the wine is poured, while getting a refill, or after drinking. The cup held by Kirke is located at the center, where one would put one's lips to drink from the real kylix. It is a playful irony, then, that the sailors have already turned into animals after drinking from Kirke's cup, and we could consider the placement of Kirke's cup to be a reminder to the drinker of the power of Dionysos's gift, to bring euphoria but also chaos. The scene on the kylix's other side holds a similar caution, showing Polyphemos in the center getting drunk on wine provided by Odysseus, which will lead to the hero blinding the Cyclops after he passes out.

Other guests in the room would be able to see the picture on the other side of a cup since it would be tilted when drinking, whereas only the drinker could see an interior picture, such as the Theseus scenes in **Figure 9.8**. Viewing them, however, would not be for long since the cup would have to be quickly leveled after sipping or risk spilling. The pictures, then, are only seen in glimpses and in motion over the course of a social occasion like the symposium. This actually makes the placement of the Minotaur scene a clever artistic choice, in that the picture would be covered with wine until drinking, when it would emerge before the viewer as Theseus emerges from the door of the dark labyrinth.

An artist can also use the three-dimensional quality of an object to emphasize a point about the narrative. In Chapter 5 we saw a skyphos that showed Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, seated in front of a loom with their son Telemachos (see **Figure 5.19, page 118**). Penelope's head rests on her hand in a pose that has been interpreted as brooding or pensive. Certainly she is in a difficult situation because of the demands of dozens of suitors for her to declare Odysseus dead and to pick one of them as her new husband. The other side of the cup shows Odysseus disguised as a beggar at the door to the house, having his feet washed by an old woman who was once his nurse (Figure 9.9). She realizes that the beggar is Odysseus by a scar on his leg from a childhood boar hunt, and she looks up at him in recognition. She is ordered to keep his identity a secret, as it is part of Odysseus's scheme to kill the suitors, who are armed and outnumber him and his son. The placement of the scenes on the skyphos means that the two scenes cannot be seen at the same time. While the viewer becomes aware that Penelope is to be reunited with Odysseus by turning the skyphos, she cannot see what is going to happen or realize that Odysseus has arrived.

These examples show that a viewer may only be able to see part of a narrative, and that its composition may be arranged to take advantage of that circumstance. We have already seen in architectural sculpture how the viewer can be engaged with the narrative by the position of the figures. On the Siphnian Treasury, the viewer is on the side of Achilles and the gods in the friezes above walking up the Sacred Way (see **Figure 7.15, page 171; Figure 8.1, page 183; Figure 9.1, page 212**). On the Parthenon frieze, the stages of the procession and ritual unfold as the viewer walks along the building, with both art and viewer heading toward the entrance to the naos on the east side of the building (see **Figure 1.1, page 2; Figure 10.15, page 250**). A viewer could also be put into the narrative itself, as is the case with the Tyrannicides set up in the Agora in 477/6 BCE



9.9 Attic red-figure skyphos attributed to the Penelope Painter, c. 450–440 BCE. 8 $\frac{1}{16}$ in (20.5 cm). Chiusi, Museo Archeologico 1831. Nurse recognizing Odysseus disguised as a beggar. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

(see **Figure 5.9, page 108**). This group shows a man (Aristogeiton) and youth (Harmodios) charging out of the crowd during the Panathenaia to slay the tyrant Hipparchos in the Agora. Standing in front of the statue, which is a primary viewing point and where the inscription would be read, the viewer is put into the position of the tyrant or crowd of the Panathenaic procession, and so becomes part of a reenactment of the original event and an actor in the drama.

These examples demonstrate that the kinds of activities in which viewers engage while looking at a visual narrative vary, from drinking at a symposion to a religious procession to conducting business in the agora. To these we can add a funerary context, which would include objects buried as grave goods, the commemoration of the dead by a tomb marker, and objects left as offerings at the tomb. A specific narrative scene, such as the blinding of Polyphemos, would not necessarily have the same meaning in a funerary context as it would in a symposion. Whereas the kylix with scenes of Kirke and Polyphemos reflects upon the symposion and drinking (see **Figure 9.6**), the same story on the Eleusis amphora (see **Figure 6.15, page 144**) would have to be interpreted in light of its use either as a grave marker, likely its original purpose, or as a burial container. We then have to consider attitudes toward death and the triumph of heroes, whose memory is perpetuated by the narratives of their deeds, as factors for interpreting a scene (Osborne 1988). Context, then, makes each narration, that is the telling and reception of the story, potentially unique.

ART AND LITERATURE

In this chapter and earlier we have had to summarize stories based on literary sources like the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* in order to analyze how the artist has chosen to construct the visual narrative. This is unavoidable for us, but it does create an interpretive problem. When comparing pictures and texts, there is a tendency today to look at images as illustrations of a text, rather than as narrative works in their own right. However, it is unlikely that any artist read a complete *Iliad* or other poem or play, or would have consulted texts when designing a picture, at least before the fourth century. The poems and plays that we have were performed publicly and so could have been known to both artist and viewer. However, in many cases the earliest narrative picture of a story predates the earliest literary version that survives, making problematic our use of later literary sources to explain early images. Indeed, both poet and artist developed their narratives from the vast repertory of stories belonging to Greek culture from the earliest days, and then altered these to create narratives that suited their purpose, sometimes with new details or actions. This means that the “facts” of some surviving literary accounts are not consistent with one another, or with the surviving pictorial narratives either. Unfortunately, the oral culture that sustained this rich narrative repertory is lost to us, so we must cautiously rely on literary sources while looking at the pictures but keep in mind that the artist did not rely on these same sources.

We can look at an example of the narrative differences between texts and images by turning to the beginning of the *Iliad* and the story of Briseis being taken from Achilles. To paraphrase, the Greek army is dying of a plague sent by Apollo, who is angry that the leader of the Greeks, Agamemnon, has taken as a war prize and concubine Chryseis, the daughter of the priest of Apollo. In order to save the army, he must give her back, an action that Achilles urges. Agamemnon, however, is angry at being without a war prize and so threatens to take the war prize of Achilles, Briseis. Achilles’s anger leads him first to threaten Agamemnon and then to withdraw to his encampment, vowing not to fight anymore. Later, Agamemnon sends two heralds to take Briseis away:

They [the heralds] went against their will beside the beach of the barren
salt sea, and came to the shelters and the ships of the Myrmidons.
The man himself they found beside his shelter and his black ship
sitting. And Achilleus took no joy at all when he saw them.... (1.327–330)

[Achilles speaks to the heralds and orders Patroklos to fetch Briseis]
 He [Patroklos] led forth from the hut Briseis of the fair cheeks and gave her
 to be taken away; and they walked back beside the ships of the Achaians,
 and the woman all unwilling went with them still. But Achilles
 weeping went and sat in sorrow apart from his companions
 beside the beach of the grey sea looking out on the infinite water. (1.346–350)

(Homer, *Iliad*, tr. Lattimore)

The poet creates a vivid scene that emphasizes the anger and grief of Achilles together with the reluctant participation of the heralds and Briseis.

The scene is rarely shown in Greek art, but appears on a red-figure kylix in the British Museum (**Figure 9.10**). On the left side of the picture we see the two heralds flanking Briseis and leading her away. On the other side of the cup, the trio is repeated, now reaching the tent of Agamemnon, an example of cyclical narrative with the handles dividing the scenes. This arrival scene, though, is not mentioned in the *Iliad*. As Briseis and the heralds exit to our left, the right half of the picture shows the tent of Achilles, with two wooden posts supporting a woven covering. Two adult men stand on either side, while inside is a beardless figure wrapped almost completely in a himation. The right hand grasps the front of the head in a gesture that is like the female mourners at a funeral pulling their hair (see **Figure 4.8, page 79** and **Figure 5.26, page 125**).

At first glance, considering this figure's heavy clothing, gesture, and placement inside the tent, one might think that this is a woman, thus Briseis, but it is rather Achilles. While Achilles sits outside the tent in the *Iliad*, placing him inside is an effective visual way for the artist to suggest the grief and tears of Achilles mentioned in the poem. There are no common visual precedents for a weeping man in art, so when trying to capture such a "non-masculine" and emotional mood in the character, the artist uses a visual vocabulary that suggests women grieving at a funeral to describe the hero's anger and loss. The artist has also borrowed from wedding imagery to show one of the heralds leading Briseis by the arm, another action not described in the poem. Since Briseis is to become Agamemnon's war trophy, the leading gesture signifies to the viewer that the woman is being led to a new situation that has aspects of marriage or concubinage about it. The destination tent on the



9.10 Attic red-figure kylix attributed to the Briseis Painter, c. 480 BCE. 11¾ in (30 cm) diameter. London, British Museum E76. Briseis led away from Achilles. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.



9.11 Lucanian red-figure pelike attributed to the Choephoroi Painter, c. 350 BCE. 16¹⁵/₁₆ in (43 cm). Paris, Musée du Louvre K544. Elektra and Orestes at tomb of Agamemnon. Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

kerykeion

the wand held by Hermes or a herald, topped by a closed circle and open circle at its top. Also called the *caduceus* in Latin

formance of the play rather than the text which might be the source. For example, a Lucanian pelike attributed to the Choephoroi Painter and dated to about 350 BCE recalls the opening scene of Aeschylus's play *Libation Bearers* (*Choephoroi*) (**Figure 9.11**). In the opening scene of the play, set at the tomb of Agamemnon, we see his son Orestes visiting the tomb with his friend Pylades. They hide when Orestes's sister Elektra comes to bring her own offerings to the tomb. She notices that someone else has been there and discovers a lock of hair that is like hers. After this Orestes steps out and reveals himself to her, as well as his plot to avenge their father's death.

The pelike shows a three-step tomb with a pillar on top. On the pillar is a krater and on the steps are a hydria and lekythos, for washing the tomb and leaving an offering of oil. Ribbons and an athlete's strigil and aryballos are tied to the pillar. Earlier offerings appear to be scattered on the ground and lower steps. Elektra is in front of the tomb, but rather than standing to make an offering, she is seated on the steps with her head in her hand like Penelope (see **Figure 5.19, page 118**). This pose, which is found in representations of Penelope in fifth- and fourth-century art, would be well known to viewers and would evoke Elektra's isolation and forlorn hope. This is a good visual choice for Elektra, who has to live in the household of her adulterous mother and uncle Aigisthos, lovers who murdered her father. The appearance of Orestes, as yet unknown to her, will be her deliverance. The painter has made use of three-dimensional representation of the picture space to show Orestes with a phiale, unseen behind and to the side of the tomb in the landscape background. While all of this can be related to the play, Pylades and an attendant for Elektra are missing. The male figure on the right is not Pylades but Hermes, as identified by his *kerykeion* and hat. Hermes does not appear in the play, although he is invoked in the opening speech of Orestes: "Hermes, lord of the dead, who watch over the powers of my fathers, be my savior and stand by my claim" (Aesch., *Cho.* 1–2, tr. Lattimore). Visually, the painter effectively represents the

other side is a further reference from wedding processions, in which the house of the groom is the destination. It is possible, given the rarity of the scene, that the artist may have been inspired by a performance of the *Iliad* in representing this story, but there might be other sources or reasons, whether literary or having to do with contemporary culture or circumstances. Regardless of the source of inspiration, the painter uses a visual language, in particular funerary and wedding imagery, that is independent of whatever textual sources were known either to the artist or to the viewer and creates an autonomous pictorial narrative. The wrath of Achilles is strong, and the atypical composition of the narrative captures that point.

Although dramatic performances in Athens were a key element of fifth-century Athenian culture, they are very limited instances of the direct influence of a play on the representation of a narrative in vase painting. There are, however, some vase paintings that appear to be inspired by dramas in fourth-century southern Italy. Interestingly, this was also a period and place where dramas first produced in fifth-century Athens by poets such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were revived on local stages. Some of these south Italian vases, which we will discuss more broadly in Chapter 12, seem to be related to surviving plays, although we have to consider that it is the per-

act of making an offering while invoking a god's help by showing Orestes holding the phiale, while Hermes, unseen by either Orestes or Elektra, offers a wreath toward the tomb of Agamemnon as if to fulfill the plea.

All of the pictures that can be associated with this scene in south Italian pottery show some degree of variation from the play and each other (Taplin 2007, 49–57). Perhaps the revival of older plays stimulated an interest in paintings showing selected scenes, making a closer connection between art and literature than is typical. But even here in the late classical period, paintings are still adaptations that draw upon motifs known to viewers through other visual narratives, like the pose of Penelope, to convey a specific sense of the narrative.

There are some pots that more self-consciously show a play as it is being performed, but these are usually comedies. For example, the krater painted by Asteas in Poseidonia/Paestum shows two actors in padded costumes, fake phalluses, and masks pulling at the legs of an old miser who clings to a chest containing his hoard (see **Figure 12.21, page 310**). The figures stand on an elevated platform with columns in front, like the front of a stage, and a door to the side leads off stage. This is unlike the circular orchestra of the Greek theater, like that at Epidauros (see **Figure 12.3, page 291**), and perhaps represents a different type of local performance setting.

CHOICE OF MOOD AND MOMENT

With this last example, we can also consider the genre or mood of a visual narrative. Comic narrative is clearly intended to amuse, and can take various forms such as satire and parody, visual puns, exaggeration, and slapstick. Most of the narratives we have seen are more serious and straightforward. Pictorial narrative can also emulate some of the features of dramatic tragedies, involving sudden changes of situation and a focus on the choices of the characters rather than strenuous action, such as the scene at the tomb of Agamemnon in **Figure 9.11**. We might also include more universalizing scenes such as the departure of a warrior, warriors fighting, or a marriage scene as a genre of narrative as well.

Judging from the plays and other testimony, comedy was very popular both as a theatrical medium and in poetry. Identifying humor in art is difficult, in that comic devices such as puns are harder for us to recognize or understand today. The dress of comic actors (see **Figure 12.21, page 310**) provides a cue to us that there is a comic rather than serious narrative intent, but we should consider that comedy could be created by pictures through the demeanor of the figures and the choice of moment shown.

One way to identify a comic narrative would be through its contrast to more standard representations of a scene. For example, we saw earlier Kirke transforming the sailors of Odysseus as the hero charges toward her in a straightforward synoptic narrative (see **Figure 9.6**). There is a trace of irony, given the context of the symposium, since Kirke's cup doubles for the actual cup in the hands of the drinker/viewer, but the scene itself is not particularly comic in its action. Another representation of the scene, on a late fifth-century, black-figure skyphos from Boeotia, is quite different (**Figure 9.12**). The deep cup is one of many examples that are connected to the sanctuary at Cabiros, called Cabiran Ware, that feature a much more caricature-like style than contemporary red-figure pottery from Athens. On the right is a loom, a symbol of domesticity that we saw in the Penelope skyphos (see **Figure 5.19, page 118**), but in the case of Kirke it is somewhat deceptive given her powers. She holds out a skyphos and wand toward Odysseus on the left. Both faces have exaggerated eyes, noses, and mouths like the masks of the actors on the Paestan krater, and Odysseus has a fake enlarged phallus as well. As in other representations of the story, Odysseus has charged in with a drawn sword, but now he is stopped in his tracks and stumbles backwards, defying the expectations of the viewer. Rather than being in control of the



9.12 Cabiran black-figure skyphos, late 5th cent. BCE. 6 $\frac{1}{16}$ in (15.4 cm). Oxford, Ashmolean Museum G.249. Kirke and Odysseus. Photo: Ashmolean Museum/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

situation, Odysseus is rebuffed by an unarmed woman. We are not entirely sure about the nature of the Cabiran mysteries, but it is possible that they involved humor and satire that ridiculed heroes or gods.

Satyrs are good for humorous antics as well (see **Figure 11.8**, page 277), and can be effective for satire by mocking the behavior of heroes and gods. A red-figure chous, a special pitcher used in the Anthesteria festival of Dionysos that celebrated the new year's new wine, shows a satyr with a club and cloak attacking a snake in a tree (**Figure 9.13**). Rather than fruit, the tree bears pitchers like the chous itself. The scene is a parody of Herakles getting the apples of the Hesperides from a tree guarded by a dragon, one of his twelve canonical labors (Walsh 2009, 238). The satyr's club is an attribute of Herakles, so the satyr is substituting for the hero, but attacking a curious snake rather than a hostile monster. Instead of apples, the satyr desires the wine of the chous pitchers in the tree and is willing to endure this "heroic" trial for his prize. His pose is heroic and muscular, but his satyr head hardly fits with the heroic body, and the prize is not the means to immortality that are the apples.

For a tragic narrative mood, we might look for pictures that concentrate on a moment of decision. For example, we saw that Exekias's version of the suicide of Ajax (see **Figure 9.5**) was quite different from much archaic narrative, in that Exekias represented the moment of decision to take action by planting the sword, rather than the more climactic result of lying on the sword that is more typical of representations of the story. Although Exekias worked before the time when drama first developed, attributed to Thespis in the later sixth century, Exekias's composition could be called tragic in mood by focusing on choice and character rather than climactic action.

We see a similar approach to the story of Pelops and Oinomaos on the east pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, dated to 470–457 BCE (**Figure 9.14**). This is not a common subject for Greek narrative art, but it is appropriate for the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. The basic story is that there was a prophecy that Oinomaos, king of nearby Pisa, would be killed by his son-in-law. He tried to prevent this by challenging all suitors to a chariot race in which he would give a head start to the suitor, but would kill him if he caught up. Since he had horses provided by Ares, this gave him an advantage and so far a number of suitors had died. Pelops was successful, and in the race Oinomaos

lost his life, leaving the kingdom to Pelops (who also gave his name to the southern peninsula of Greece, the Peloponnesos). Since the city of Elis had defeated Pisa for control of the sanctuary in 470 and began the temple immediately afterward, featuring the race that the king of Pisa had lost would be an appropriate subject symbolizing the victory of Elis.

Our literary sources have different reasons as to why Pelops won. In Pindar's account (*Olympian* 1), our earliest version dating to 476 BCE and hence before the temple was started, Pelops was given horses by Poseidon, a former lover; with these he was successful in neutralizing the unfair advantage of Oinomaos. A slightly later version, c. 440, by the Athenian mythographer Pherekydes, states that Pelops bribed Myrtilos, charioteer of Oinomaos, to sabotage the wheel of Oinomaos's chariot, causing it to fall off during the race and precipitate the king's death. Pelops later killed Myrtilos when he tried to collect the bribe, and the charioteer called a curse down on the family. Certainly the family of Pelops was cursed. Atreus, the oldest son and Pelops's successor, killed the children of his brother Thyestes, serving them to their father in a stew, apparently because Thyestes plotted to overthrow Atreus by sleeping with his wife. Thyestes was exiled along with his remaining son, Aigisthos. The curse continued into the next generation when Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, sacrificed his daughter Iphigeneia to sail to Troy. While he was away, his wife Klytaimnestra slept with Aigisthos and together they plotted to murder Agamemnon on his return. Finally, the son of Agamemnon, Orestes, acting on the word of Apollo, killed his uncle and mother but was set upon by the Furies, who were finally appeased by the intervention of Athena. The story of the house of Agamemnon is the subject of a trilogy composed by Aeschylus in 458 BCE that serves as a foundational story for trial by jury in the polis. With such a legacy, the oath of Pelops and Oinomaos at Olympia and its interpretation become entangled in the competing versions of the oath and its aftermath.

The sculpture at Olympia was found dispersed across the site during the excavations there, and controversies persist to this day regarding the placement of the figures and determining the narrative direction. The identity of the five main figures seems well established, and we will discuss the composition as it appears in the current installation in the museum at Olympia. In the center stands Zeus, at a larger scale than the mortals around him. Before him, on our left, king Oinomaos of Pisa sets out the terms of a race, while Pelops listens to our right. Oinomaos is bearded whereas Pelops is not, and so is designated the senior figure. Flanking Oinomaos is his wife Sterope, mother of Hippodamia, who stands next to Pelops and pulls at her mantle in a gesture associated with the *anakalypsis*, the revealing of the bride in marriage. On either side of the central group are the chariot teams being readied by the attendants for the race. Beyond them are two seated figures who are seers; the one on the right, called the Old Seer, holds his hand to his face and has opened his mouth in what is seen as a gesture of concern. Personifications of the river gods lie at the corners of the pediment.

Looking at the pediment, the emphasis is not upon the race but upon the oath taken by the participants beforehand setting out the terms. Oinomaos's pose is strident and has been seen as



9.13 Attic red-figure chous attributed to the Group of Berlin 2415, c. 460 BCE. 9½ in (24.1 cm). From Capua. London, British Museum E539. Satyr attacking tree with jugs (mocking Herakles and apples of Hesperides). Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

anakalypsis

the gesture in the wedding in which the bride unveils herself to the groom. In art this is typically seen as a reference when a woman pulls her mantle away from her face or shoulder



9.14 East pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, c. 470–457 BCE. Height of central figure: 10 ft 2 in (3.1 m). Olympia Museum. Oath of Pelops and Oinomaos. Photo: © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY.

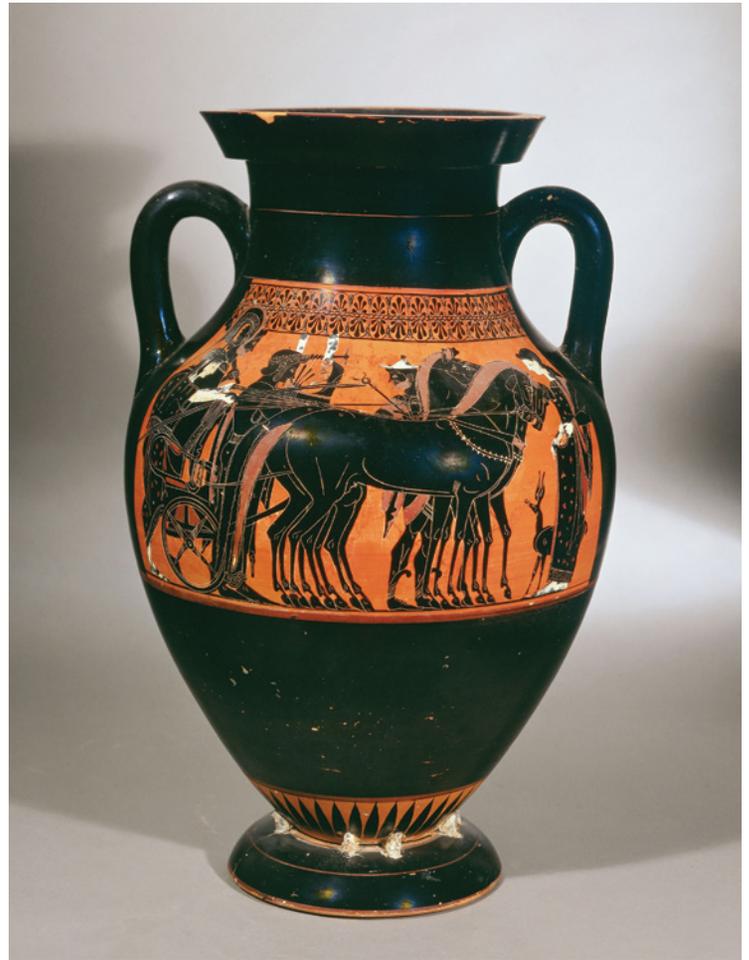
arrogant, particularly as he is attempting to defy a divine prophecy and is also denying the opportunity for an heir to the kingdom by preventing the marriage of his daughter. Whether Pelops is competing fairly or not is hard to say based on what we see. The Old Seer is certainly expressing concern at what he sees. A viewer could read this as shock at Oinomaos, who will die, Pelops, who may be cheating, or at both for violating or intending to violate their oath. Whatever the case, it is the oath that is the important action of the narrative. Zeus, as arbiter of oaths, becomes central in overseeing the consequences of the action.

The ritualistic context of the temple also helps to explain why the oath would be an appropriate narrative, in that the open area in front of the temple is where the Olympic athletes swore their competition oaths (see **Figure 7.3**, page 158). In either version of the story, Oinomaos has been cheating by having divine horses, and his eventual demise is the consequence of his false oath. Given that the Temple of Zeus was built by the Eleans, who had defeated the nearby Pisans for control of the sanctuary, this makes Pelops's triumph over Oinomaos a metaphor for the Eleans' victory over the Pisans. As Judith Barringer has pointed out, it is not likely that the Eleans would suggest that Pelops, too, cheated, as he was worshipped at the site (Barringer 2008, 51–52). However, by focusing on the moment of decision rather than the consequent action, it is possible for a viewer to regard Pelops in the same light as Oinomaos and give a very different direction to the story, one that encompasses the many murders that plague the house of Pelops. Ultimately, the viewer has to fill in the gaps of the narrative to develop a reading of the story, whatever the original intentions of the designers may have been.

SYMBOLIC AND UNIVERSAL ASPECTS OF NARRATIVE

In looking at Greek narrative, we have to think not only about the immediate story and viewing circumstances, but also about the symbolic value of narrative for contemporary culture and events. Whereas there were many decisive events in Greek history, such as the battles of the Persians and Greeks, Athenians and Spartans, the sack of Athens in 480 BCE, and others, rarely did Greek artists show these events as narrative pictures. Rather, battles such as those of the Lapiths and Centaurs, the Greeks and Amazons, the Trojan War, and the Gigantomachy served sometimes as metaphors for historical events. To end this chapter, we will explore some of the symbolic value of Greek narrative art and consider its appeal to a non-Greek audience like the Etruscans.

An Attic black-figure amphora with a scene of the apotheosis of Herakles was discovered in Poseidonia/Paestum just north of the agora (**Figure 9.15**). It and eight bronze vases were excavated in a roofed, rectangular chamber that was dug into the ground within a temenos (see **Figure 5.3**, page 103). Inside the vases had been placed around a stone platform with remains of



9.15 Attic black-figure amphora from the heroön at Poseidonia/Paestum, attributed to the Chiusi Painter, c. 510 BCE. 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ in (58 cm). Paestum, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 133153. Apotheosis of Herakles. Photo: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali/Art Resource, NY.



9.16 Attic black-figure column krater, mid-6th cent. BCE. From the Tomb of the Panathenaic Amphorae, Orvieto. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 22203. Warriors fighting. Photo courtesy Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence.

iron, cloth, and lead, possibly the remains of a bed or couch. There is no inscription to identify the chamber or its dedication, but it is thought to be a heroön, built as a tomb but without a body, perhaps in honor of a founder of Poseidonia/Paestum or its mother city, Sybaris. Some of the bronze vessels contained offerings of honey sealed with wax, but the subject of the single figured amphora is symbolically interesting. As a reward for his assistance to the gods and for his heroic deeds, Herakles was granted immortality and married to the goddess Hebe. In the sixth century scenes of the apotheosis, or deification, of Herakles became common in Athenian art, following a formula of Athena driving him in a chariot. This subject becomes particularly meaningful within the context of the Poseidonia/Paestum heroön, since its dedicatee was honored by the citizens of the town as a deified hero, who lives on through their veneration and memory, as does Herakles. It is not always possible to hypothesize a symbolic connection between a narrative and context, but it is important to remember that narrative could function as a metaphor, relying upon its symbolic value to link the present with the past.

Another vase, an Attic black-figure column krater, was found in an Etruscan tomb in Orvieto, the Tomb of the Panathenaic Amphorae (**Figure 9.16**). On one side of the vase is a scene of a warrior departing, a theme we will examine below. The other is a universal scene of two warriors fighting over a fallen warrior who lies at their feet. There are a few dots in front of the warriors' helmets that look a bit like inscriptions, but these are anonymous warriors like those on the Middle Geometric skyphos from Eleusis (see **Figure 9.2**, page 213). Clearly the artist could have

provided an attribute or inscription if necessary, but we can consider what value it might have to leave the subject ambiguous. The vase was exported from Athens around the middle of the sixth century, about two decades after the François Vase (see **Figure 8.23, page 203**) when foreign markets, especially in Etruria, had become an important outlet for Attic painted pottery. Orvieto was a common destination for such pottery, but it is well inland from the coast, making transportation of such a large vessel to its destination an added effort and expense.

As we have noted in Chapter 8, Attic pottery did distinguish itself by representing a very large number of narrative scenes that were otherwise unavailable in competing wares. Mythological pictures would have had an appeal, particularly for Etruscans who had some familiarity with Greek mythology, but the images could have had a broader attraction. Even if a scene like the warriors fighting on this krater was not transformed into a mythological scene like Achilles and Memnon by the addition of inscriptions, as on the Siphnian Treasury, the action itself would have had value for the deceased and the family. Just as in Greek cities, members of a household would leave for war and fight in battle. Actual battles did not feature the duels represented in most battle scenes like this. The focus on elite warriors fighting conferred a heroic scale on the anonymous figures for the viewer. As if to reinforce this, the warriors are watched by a variety of spectators: adult men, youths, and women, the members of the city who would witness and remember the deeds of a city's soldiers. Vases such as this might have been used in a household as part of the Etruscan equivalent of the symposium and then placed into the tomb in honor of the deceased. In either case, the narrative picture mirrors on a heroic scale the actions of its users and culture, a symbolic value that would appeal to both Greek and non-Greek viewers according to their situation.

Many of the action scenes in Greek pottery are not specific subjects, like the deeds of Herakles, but are formulaic and can represent the action of an individual within a more universal setting. For example, the third-century metope from a tomb in Taras/Taranto shows a warrior on horseback attacking a fallen soldier (**Figure 9.17**). The rider is shown in armor and gear like a real cavalryman, but the opponent is nude except for his shield. This is a formulaic battle composition that was common in art from the sixth century onward and can also be seen in another work, the cenotaph of Dexileos from 394/3 BCE (see **Figures 12.12 and 12.13, pages 301, 302**). The metope in Taras/Taranto is one of six combats on the tomb, but none shows details that would link them to a specific individual or battle. Indeed, the inscription for Dexileos's monument tells us that he died fighting, so the triumphant rider in battle is not a true-to-life representation of Dexileos in battle either. Rather, the triumphant rider composition creates a heroic narrative for the deceased that becomes, like a kouros or kore figure, an idealization of the individual. We might call narrative representations such as this universalizing, in that rather than showing specific contemporary events, a heroic formula symbolizes the achievements of the deceased.

Indeed, many if not most of Greek narrative pictures are similarly universal. The body of a red-figure krater of the middle of the fifth century shows a young man in armor and cloak and holding a spear, reaching out to touch the hand of a woman who holds a second spear and helmet (**Figure 9.18**).



9.17 Metope of Naiskos Tomb from Via Umberto, Taras/Taranto, 300–250 BCE. Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 113768. 20¼ in (51.5 cm). Battle scene with rider. Photo: Museum.



9.18 Attic red-figure volute krater attributed to the Niobid Painter, c. 460 BCE. 26¾ in (68 cm). Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 33.56. Body: departure of warrior; neck: Peleus pursuing Thetis. Photograph © 2014 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Between them is another woman holding a phiale and oinochoe to pour a libation. Other women and an old man seated at the far left look on, while an adult man wearing a wreath walks away. The scene shows the warrior's departure from his home to fight in the army. The women might include a wife, mother, sister or other relations, while the old man could be his father, or grandfather if the departing man is the head of the household. The ages and relationships of the figures are ambiguous, but this is part of the appeal of the narrative composition for the viewer. In purchasing such a vase, whether to use in a symposium or to put into a tomb as a grave good, the owner can identify these idealized figures according to his or her particular circumstances. Most men who owned such a vase as this would have fought in the army and participated in a departure ceremony, although not as rich or elaborate as this one, as would most of the women in a family. Making a pot like this for export, the painter uses narrative scenes that can become specific through the actions of the viewer/owner of the vase.

Turning back to the battle scene on the Middle Geometric skyphos from Eleusis (see **Figure 9.2, page 213**), itself a grave good, we can understand even these simple action pictures of the Geometric period in the same way, as idealized and universal narratives that show the story of actual lives in a heroic, timeless way. In looking at hunting scenes (see **Figure 6.11, page 141**) or wedding scenes (see **Figure 13.4, page 326**), we should consider how the narrative represents the *ethos* or character of its participants, and, by extension, the *ethos* of the viewers or recipients of the work. Context, then, shapes the results or “readings” of the narrative, even to the present day.

TEXTBOX: INTERPRETATION AND INFORMATION THEORY

The traditional approach to analyzing the meaning of a work of art, called iconography, involves analysis of the actions, attributes, and characters in an image and, consulting literary sources for the story, the development of an interpretation of a scene. In cases where our literary sources are vague or nonexistent, as with the scene of Achilles and Ajax playing a game (see **Figure 8.24, page 204**), we are left to consider the story or its meaning based mostly on the image itself. In some cases, iconography can yield competing theories, particularly when the literary sources are fragmentary or contradict the image. For example, the Parthenon frieze has long been associated with the Panathenaic procession, but there are discrepancies between participants in the image and what we learn from literary sources, all of which are much older. An alternative theory was proposed by Joan Breton Connelly based on fragments of a play by Euripides, arguing that the central scene (see **Figure 10.15, page 250**) shows the daughters of Erechtheus preparing to sacrifice themselves to save the city from an invasion (see Connelly 1996, 2014). This theory has generated considerable controversy in the scholarship, particularly as it involves human sacrifice.

Given the limitations in our sources and considering artists as independent storytellers, alternative approaches to meaning have been developed that can supplement iconography (see Stansbury-O'Donnell 2011, 57–109). One example is Ann Steiner's use of information theory for “reading” Greek vases (Steiner 2007). This is based on understanding how, in language or communication, humans can filter out the noise of a signal to identify a message or intention. In particular, information theory focuses upon various forms of repetition in a message to create a structured and meaningful communication. Repetition signals an intentionality or pattern for decoding a message, and can also be used to emphasize specific parts of the message as important.

This is a useful framework for looking at narrative images, especially when considering that an Athenian vase painter was usually making an image on a vase for export, whether to a Greek colony or to a non-Greek people like the Etruscans. An effective narrative depends not only upon the creation of the narrative image, but also upon its successful recognition and reception. Since storyteller and viewer may not share a common language or set of stories, a successful narrative would depend upon the inclusion of enough signals for some type of story to be conveyed, even if the artist's intention and the viewer's understanding diverged. Repetition in an image can help the viewer, as can repeated exposure to the story on multiple objects. In the case of Ajax and Achilles playing a game, many images of which were exported to Etruria, the continued production of such scenes shows us that it was a successful story that continued to be of interest in the market. Thus it can provide a key for understanding the reception of the narrative image by the ancient viewer.

REFERENCES

- Aeschylus, *Choephoroi*. 1953. In *Oresteia: Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides*, tr. R. Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Barringer, J. M. 2008. *Art, Myth, and Ritual in Classical Greece*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Connelly, J. B. 1996. "Parthenon and Parthenoi: A Mythological Interpretation of the Parthenon Frieze." *American Journal of Archaeology* 100, 58–80.
- Connelly, J. B. 2014. *The Parthenon Enigma*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Davies, M. 1986. "A Convention of Metamorphosis in Greek Art." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106, 182–183.
- Homer, *Iliad*. 1951. *The Iliad of Homer*, tr. R. Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hurwit, J. M. 1982. "Palm Trees and the Pathetic Fallacy in Archaic Greek Poetry and Art." *Classical Journal* 77, 193–199.
- Hurwit, J. M. 1983. "Professor Hurwit Replies." *Classical Journal* 78, 200–201.
- Madden, J. D. 1983. "The Palms Do Not Weep: A Reply to Professor Hurwit and a Note on the Death of Priam in Greek Art." *Classical Journal* 78, 193–199.
- Osborne, R. 1988. "Death Revisited, Death Revised: The Death of the Artist in Archaic and Classical Greece." *Art History* 11, 1–16.
- Stansbury-O'Donnell, M. D. 2011. *Looking at Greek Art*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Steiner, A. 2007. *Reading Greek Vases*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stewart, A. 1983. "Stesichoros and the François Vase." In W. Moon, ed. *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography*, 53–74. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Taplin, O. 2007. *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum.
- Walsh, D. 2009. *Distorted Ideals in Greek Vase-Painting: The World of Mythological Burlesque*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

FURTHER READING

- Carpenter, T. H. 1991. *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Giuliani, L. 2013. *Image and Myth: A History of Pictorial Narration in Greek Art*, tr. J. O'Donnell. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Junker, K. 2012. *Interpreting the Images of Greek Myths*, tr. A. Künzl-Snodgrass and A. Snodgrass. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitchell, A. G. 2009. *Greek Vase-Painting and the Origins of Visual Humour*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shapiro, H. A. 1994. *Myth into Art: Poet and Painter in Classical Greece*. London: Routledge.
- Small, J. P. 2003. *The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Snodgrass, A. 1982. *Narration and Allusion in Archaic Greek Art*. Eleventh J. L. Myres Memorial Lecture. Oxford: Leopard's Head Press.
- Squire, M. 2009. *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stansbury-O'Donnell, M. D. 1999. *Pictorial Narrative in Ancient Greek Art*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Steiner, A. 2007. *Reading Greek Vases*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taplin, O. 2007. *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum.