

Felix Pirson, **Ansichten des Krieges. Kampfreiefs klassischer und hellenistischer Zeit im Kulturvergleich**. Publisher Dr. Ludwig Reichert, Wiesbaden 2014. 408 pages with 560 illustrations in black and white, 60 plates.

Felix Pirson's study, a revision of his Habilitationsschrift at the University of Leipzig, begins with a creative Introduction that places us squarely in the present: a discussion of the representation of warfare in modern media, specifically film. He uses this device to introduce his investigation into the depiction of warfare on reliefs of the late fifth to early first centuries B. C. and how perceptions of combat shape such imagery in different historical contexts. Most such depictions occur on funerary reliefs, which make up the majority of his 195 examples, which derive from Athens, Lycia, the northern Black Sea region, Etruria, and elsewhere, but architectural sculpture offers some instances, as well. Focusing only on non-mythological scenes and concentrating on motif, style, and image type (historical, biographical, general), Pirson regards the reliefs and their manipulation of this Bildsprache as indicative of public perceptions of warfare, and he is especially curious about how veterans might have understood the images and how these may have been tailored for them. He emphasizes that the reliefs were not intended as documentary images of warfare, a point that, to my mind, hardly needs to be stated.

Eight chapters present the material geographically and chronologically. The first three explain the painstaking methodology. The first chapter defines terminology and iconological method, and the second describes and discusses thirteen basic compositional motifs (pie charts in individual chapters summarize the appearance of these poses in various contexts). The third chapter concentrates on the focal point of

the representations, i. e., what moment or action is shown. We learn that the images are conservative in that they repeatedly employ only a handful of the compositional motifs within any given time span, for example, five motifs are common in the late sixth and fifth centuries, while three motifs dominate the late classical and early Hellenistic reliefs. Interestingly, forty percent of all motifs were used only a single time, and there is greater variation in compositional motifs used for warriors in the ›losing‹ position. By closely observing attire, weaponry, armor, and composition, Pirson demonstrates that the motifs possess connotations of valor and triumph attached to the victor. Chapters 4 to 8 offer various case studies of the use of warrior motifs in: Athenian reliefs of 430–320/310 B. C.; Lycia and northern Black Sea realm of the fourth century as well as Greco-Skythian art; Hellenistic reliefs; and Hellenistic Etruria. A final chapter provides comparative perspectives and conclusions. A lengthy catalogue of objects follows, together with another comprised of drawings of all the compositional motifs encountered in the study. Summaries in German and English and a list of illustrations conclude the text.

Pirson begins the case studies (Chapter 4) with three examples of Attic material: the battle friezes on the temple of Athena Nike on the Athenian Akropolis, the Pythodoros relief from Eleusis, and funerary reliefs. Unsurprisingly, valorization of the deceased, who is shown in the ›winning‹ position, is common to all three. In his perusal of this material, the author considers, among other things, the social status of the warriors, nudity in the depictions, and the realism value of the imagery with respect to clothing and weaponry. The rarity of nudity on private and public grave monuments is notable and was perhaps the result of wishing not to underscore the superiority of any given warrior by depicting him heroically nude. By contrast, the nude Greek warriors on the friezes from the temple of Athena Nike are differentiated from their clothed Persian opponents to highlight their valor and to diminish their enemies, but Pirson notes that the Greeks fighting unclothed opponents on the west frieze of the temple ennoble the opponents. In other words, nudity has multiple meanings. The recent relevant iconological study by Jeffrey M. Hurwit might have been useful in this discussion (*Am. Journal Arch.* III, 2007, 35–60). Pirson asserts that the friezes adorning the Athena Nike temple – together with the decorated balustrade – signify ›victory‹ to the viewer, as other scholars have noted.

The Athenian public monuments discussed here emphasize collective actions, while the private grave monuments focus on the courageous fight of the deceased; this distinction is expressed by compositional motifs and details of the depictions themselves. Pirson notes that the twenty-seven depictions of combat on Classical Attic grave reliefs make up a remarkably small proportion, scarcely one percent of more than three thousand examples of Attic grave stelai from the

time period under examination. In part, this is due to the deposition of the war dead in the demosion sema rather than in a family plot, where a cenotaph, such as the Dexileos stele, might serve as a substitute and indicate the manner of death. The great variety of motifs on the reliefs from Athens in the period under discussion is noteworthy, but of special interest is the relatively large number of ›losing‹ figures depicted not just under attack but already on the ground while still putting up a fight on private grave monuments. Ultimately, according to Pirson, the images were meant as an exhortation to proper military conduct and bravery.

Unlike the Attic examples, there are fewer mythological and more historical images among the Lycian corpus (Chapter 5), which span the fourth century but are especially common in its second quarter, when the Persian empire controlled this area. All except one example, the step monument at Tlos, are funerary monuments, including the well-known Nereid Monument in Xanthos and the Heroon at Trysa. Pirson first considers the evidence for Lycian ideas about warfare in the late fifth and fourth centuries; here the visual evidence is far more plentiful than the written, and unlike the situation in Athens where the placement of the reliefs at tombs, and the location of funerary monuments themselves exhibit greater variety. What is truly striking in contrast to the Attic counterparts is the individuality of the various Lycian motifs and their contexts, which, as Pirson explains, is a result of the political and social situation: while Athens necessitated underscoring collective action by not singling out an individual for praise, the ennobling of individuals in Persian-dominated Lycia – particularly Xanthos, the source of a large proportion of the reliefs – is the norm. The latter practice reflects a different political organization under a local dynast, whose legitimacy was heightened by motifs celebrating his military competence and leadership capabilities, virtues outlined in a dynastic inscription from Xanthos, where these qualities are deemed necessary for political power. As is typical in discussions of Lycian material, effort is spent trying to discern Greek and Persian influences in the imagery although Pirson rightly acknowledges that the Lycians infused compositional motifs with local meaning.

Because the art of the Black Sea region and ›Graeco-Skythia‹ share the Greek visual language used in Athens and Lycia, Pirson considers their battle imagery on eighteen stone and metal objects and appliques from grave and other public monuments, as well. Objects in the Bosphorus region seem to have employed imagery designed to appeal to the local inhabitants and neighbors during the late fifth to late fourth centuries. As with the treatment of Lycian materials, the effort to distinguish Greek from non-Greek motifs in eastern art is discussed. But citing Mariusz Mielczarek's 1999 study of the Bosphoran army, Pirson argues that Greek and Skythian weapons and military tactics were combined to form a Bosphoran warrior

ideal as indicated by archaeological evidence, and this new exemplar is reflected in warfare images. Aspects of local forms of warfare – fighting on horseback and use of bow and arrow – were played down although a striking aspect of the images from this region is their attention to authentic detail of garments and weapons. Some motifs, including some unusually violent images and depictions emphasizing comradeship among soldiers are singular, probably tailored for the local populace.

As a prerequisite to examining the Etruscan material in the Hellenistic period, Pirson turns his attention in Chapter 7 to the motif of warfare on other Hellenistic reliefs. The material here, a selection from a vast geographical range (the Athenian Akropolis, Lefkadia in Macedonia, Lecce, Ephesos, Delphi, Taranto, Sidon, and Bithynia) is intended to give an overview, and the author is aware that this assemblage denies the possibility of providing a cultural overview. This is an unfortunate departure from his practice in earlier chapters since the investigation of cultural context is one of the stated aims of this study. One wonders on which basis the selection of reliefs was made, and what percentage of the total appears here. Why, for example, are late fifth-century western Greek reliefs not considered here or elsewhere? This deviation from the book's established methodology yields some dramatic results, especially an increase in the number of mounted warriors and a greater interest in pathos and drama (as is typical for the Hellenistic period), but perhaps the outcomes are not so meaningful as they might at first appear. Seventy percent of the twenty reliefs depict singular compositions, i. e., a good two-thirds of the motifs differ from each other, and nearly every second motif is completely new to the entire repertory of battle images. But if we consider all previous reliefs discussed in the text from the fourth century – Attic, Lycian, and Bosphoran – as a single corpus, the proportional results for the Hellenistic reliefs discussed in Chapter 7 may not be so striking.

Chapter 8 addresses more than ninety Hellenistic (third to early first centuries) funerary reliefs from Etruria, a topic that certainly deserves more attention than it usually receives in the iconological literature. Numerically the largest group depicts combat against the Celts, who are identifiable by their garments and weapons, but there are other warfare images as well, including biographical depictions. The rationale for the choice of reliefs is explained in note 896, and according to the author, northern Etruria constituted a cultural and political unity, generally speaking, at this time although there were some local differences. Yet in a turnabout from his organization in Chapter 7, Pirson divides up his discussion of context by region. The majority of images concentrate on the last stages of combat, with soldiers using drawn daggers at the moment of greatest drama. Individuals are singled out for their military prowess, a reflection of contemporary social values and the use of funeral images of this type in family tombs.

Chapter 9 offers a brief conclusion to the text. Considering the vast time period, geography, and cultural differences involved, as well as the limited written sources, Pirson's stated aim of exploring the perception of warfare remains largely elusive. We have the imagery and can trace changes in the iconography, which yields significant information about depictions of warfare in certain locations at certain times and their suitability for various contexts. What is much harder to know, of course, is how veterans, soldiers, or neither, actually understood the depictions. One way of getting closer to this issue would be to examine images of warfare on mobile objects for private use, that is, in vase painting, for example, or other media, and to compare such images with the civic and funerary monuments. One wonders also about the use of color in sculpture, for example the Alexander sarcophagus, which is discussed in this book, and how that might have been used to underscore meaning about warfare or may have varied according to regional tastes. One hopes for a more holistic and exhaustive view of perceptions of warfare in the future.

Pirson's omission of mythological imagery from his examination is understandable and yet there are instances where its inclusion would have deepened this study. This is especially the case for ambiguous images, i. e., depictions where myth may serve as an analogy for actual events. The north frieze of the Temple of Athena Nike is a case in point. Because of the presence of a Corinthian helmet and chariot on the north frieze, Pirson follows the interpretation that regards the frieze as a mythological battle and so excludes it from his consideration. But he misses Peter Schultz's argument that the north frieze depicts a mythological analogy (the defeat of the Peloponnesian Eurystheus by Theseus or his sons) for an actual battle in the Peloponnesian War (in: O. Palagia, *Art in Athens during the Peloponnesian War* [Cambridge 2009] 128–167). If this were the case, then the use of myth would tell us a lot about perceptions of warfare. The author's ideas about the temple's friezes might have received support by the proposal from Schultz, David Scahill, and Mike Lippman that the entire Athena Nike bastion – not just the sculpture – celebrated victory, as indicated by the placement of shields from the battle of Sphacteria (425 B. C.) on its walls (*Am. Journal Arch.* 110, 2006, 551–63. Also absent is the recent study on Athenian architectural sculpture during the Peloponnesian War, v. I. Leventis, *Πολύ σε κρίση. Αρχιτεκτονική γλυπτική της Αθήνας στην περίοδο του Πελοποννησιακού πολέμου* [Athens 2014]).

The excellent production values make this book a pleasure to handle and read. (I spotted only a couple of spelling or typographical errors.) Sixty plates, which present sharp, clear photos and drawings, often at large scale, are a fitting accompaniment to this methodical and thoughtful study. But the lack of maps (of findspots, for example) and of a thematic index, to-

gether with the use of some highly specialized abbreviations, make this tome far less useful and usable than it might otherwise have been (for example, 'TL' for E. Kalinka [ed.], *Tituli Asiae Minoris I. Tituli Lyciae lingua Lycia conscripti* and *Tituli Asiae Minoris II. Tituli Lyciae linguis Graeca et Latina conscripti*). In the past, it was typical that habilitations were usually published without an index and with little revision. But the scholarly world and the world of publishing have changed. One must ask for whom these books are produced. With a subject this interesting and publication quality this high, one would hope for a wider readership than the small handful of people with all the skills necessary to work through this volume, and it is a pity that the author (or press) did not think more carefully about prospective readers.

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