

Tonio Hölscher, **Mythenbilder und Mentalität in Athen von Kleisthenes zu den Perserkriegen. Ein Versuch zur historischen Psychologie der Griechen.** Trierer Winckelmannsprogramm, volume 27, 2016. Publisher Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2019. 30 pages with 1 illustration and 8 black and white plates.

This essay is the published version of the annual lecture in memory of Johann Joachim Winckelmann held at the University of Trier and delivered by Tonio Hölscher in 2016. The author's aim is to trace the ways that visual evidence, particularly in the form of vase paintings, can help us to explore the emotional and psychological impact on Athens of the tumultuous changes which occurred in the wake of the Kleisthenic reforms and during the Persian Wars. While the historical accounts of these years were written decades later by Herodotus and Thucydides, Hölscher notes that an abundance of contemporary visual evidence in the form of vase paintings is available to us, and argues that we can use this to explore the emotional atmosphere of this time of radical change and external conflict. While the vases show images both from everyday reality and myth, it is the mythological images which are his focus, since in these, we are told, we can see not just paradigms and ideals, but also hopes, utopias, and horrific visions, which give access to the emotional atmosphere in Athens at the time. As an illustration, vases showing the Fall of Troy are discussed, whose images of the contrasting fortunes of war must have resonated with contemporary experience during the Persian Wars, and in particular with the Sack of Miletos in 494 B. C. The rest of the essay focuses on three other case studies: the labours of Theseus, visions of gods' love affairs with mortals, and the death of Orpheus at the hands of the Thracian women.

Before he embarks on the case studies, Hölscher sketches the broader assumptions and parameters of his approach. First he outlines the potential connections between myth and reality, noting that there is not a direct correlation between the Fall of Troy and the contemporary historical situation – especially since here it is the foreign state which is invaded by Greek forces. Instead the Fall of Troy offered a range of examples of potential experiences of war, through which viewers

could understand their contemporary situation and the threats facing them. Thus in contrast to the use of Troy in political discourse, where it could offer a model for the struggle of Athens against the barbarian, the vase paintings express instead the hopes and fears of those who view them. This is tied closely with the social situation in which the vases are viewed – that of the symposium, which he had earlier also identified as the context in which much of the political changes of these years, such as Kleisthenes' reforms, must have been debated and decided. Given that many of these vases, though produced in Athens, were actually found in Etruria, Southern Italy or Sicily, Hölscher does briefly discuss the question of their relevance in both the place of production (Athens), and of reception, though the rest of the essay is firmly focussed on Athens.

The discussion then turns to the three case studies, starting with Theseus, whose relevance for Athens at this time of political change has already been well discussed by others. The author's focus is particularly on the new deeds ascribed to Theseus at this period, notably his youthful exploits as an ephebe when he journeys from his childhood home in Troizen to Athens, which start to appear in vase paintings in the last decade of the sixth century B. C. These six deeds are divided into two groups, those outside Attica, where Theseus struggles against wild enemies, and those within the boundaries of Attica. The later group consist of Theseus' encounters with Skiron, Kerkyon and Prokrustes. All three are shown to exemplify threats against traditional elite values. Skiron subverts the value of guest friendship, Kerkyon perverts the athletic code and Prokrustes threatens the core aristocratic institution of the symposium. Outside Attica, Theseus encounters Periphates, whose iron club is seen as emblematic of older uncivilised forms of battle, Sinis, whose use of pine trees to tear his victims apart is read as a perversion of the proper use of the pine as a tree sacred to Poseidon and of the skills used in shipbuilding, and the sow of Krommyon, read as a perversion of the proper form of the hunt between a man and a boar. In all of these Theseus takes on the role of defender of traditional elite values against those who would pervert or threaten them.

Hölscher also discusses here the appearance of these deeds on the metopes of the Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi, where they are combined with scenes of his defeat of the bull of Marathon, and battle against the Minotaur. Here we see Theseus both as an ephebe, in his youthful deeds, and as a neos, a young man, defending his city. The presence of Athena in these metopes asserts the close link between the hero and the city, showing him as a hero of the state and embodiment of the ideal ephebe. Hölscher discusses the dating of the Treasury, supporting those who argue for an earlier date, and he sees the Treasury as an offering erected about 506 B. C. after the victory over Chalkis and Boeotia, with the dedication after Marathon added later. Theseus is the embodiment of the new Athenian youth; his defence of traditional values shows that he is no revolutionary hero,

but nevertheless expresses the confidence and exhilaration felt in Athens in the wake of the Kleisthenic reforms, embodied in this figure of the ideal ephebe. Thus he gives expression to a psychological exhilaration and confidence in the future.

In the next section, we turn to images of the mortal loves of the gods, suggesting that they express the exuberance and confidence in divine favour felt in Athens after the victories over the Persians at Marathon, Salamis and Plataea. A particular focus lies on two particular scenes, the abduction of Oreithyia by the god of the north wind, Boreas, and the pursuit of Kephalos by the dawn goddess, Eos. Both mortals are Athenian and these scenes of their pursuit by the gods are seen as signs of the passions of the gods for Athens and its people. An oracle in 480 B. C. told Athens to trust in its son-in-law, identified through his link with Oreithyia (daughter of the Athenian king Erechtheus) as the god Boreas. A storm had already wrecked much of the Persian fleet at Mount Athos earlier in 492 B. C., and now again northerly winds attacked the Persian ships. The Athenians later repaid Boreas through the erection of a sanctuary to him at the Ilissos river (Herod. 7, 189). A fragment of Simonides also suggests a link between the union of Boreas and Oreithyia and a sea-battle, and may, as suggested, have been delivered at the dedication of the sanctuary. Hölscher argues that scenes of the pursuit of Oreithyia on vases should be seen in the light of this link; here the god is shown as wild and violent, emphasising his power. Later images show a less fearsome divinity, with normal features, while Athena sometimes appears sanctioning the union.

Images of Eos show the dawn goddess with a number of mortal paramours. While the youth is seldom labelled, where inscriptions are present Kephalos is the most popular identification (six inscriptions compared to one for Tithonos, n. 42). Like Oreithyia, Kephalos is a child of Athens; he is represented either as a hunter or with attributes such as the lyre, identifying him as the prototype of an Athenian ephebe. Eos embodies the new dawn which rose in Athens after the removal of the tyrants. Both couples appear later on public buildings dedicated by the Athenians. Eos and Kephalos were one of the groups decorating the roof of the Stoa of the Archon Basileus in the Athenian Agora, alongside Theseus and Skiron, while both couples appear as Acroteria on the Temple dedicated by the Athenians on Delos in 425 B. C. This suggests a close association with state self-representation, which the earlier vase paintings also reflect. Oreithyia and Kephalos can be seen as archetypes for Athenian youths of both genders, and the love they elicited from the gods. The other images of divine pursuits of mortals at this time are also discussed. While modern eyes often view these myths as disturbing representations of (mostly) male sexual aggression, Hölscher urges caution, arguing that they must be seen in the light of the contemporary society. He suggests that these erotic relationships between mortals and gods allow the viewer to empathise with either role, and notes that while the

pursuits are powerful and often violent, in many cases they also lead to happiness.

The final case study discusses scenes of the death of Orpheus at the hands of the Thracian women, after their menfolk had been bewitched by his musical powers. Hölscher reads this as evidence of psychological attitudes towards foreigners at the time of the Persian wars. Orpheus is represented here as a typical Greek musician, while the Thracian women are marked as wild and uncivilised. Later representations of Orpheus among the Thracian men show a change in tone, suggesting a changed relationship with those outside Greece.

In his conclusion Hölscher returns to the question of how these mythological images can be seen to relate to the historical circumstances in which they were produced. As he notes, the chronology cannot be determined sufficiently to decide whether scenes such as the Fall of Troy came before or after the Sack of Miletos and, later, of Athens itself. Rather than tracing strict lines between images and events, he seeks to define the overall atmosphere in which the vases were produced and viewed. These images were not painted in a vacuum, but within a society which experienced vast and rapid change – the visions of bliss, violence and heroism which they portray reflect the psychological concerns of the time.

Overall this is a stimulating and broadly convincing argument, though individual readers will no doubt find some sections more persuasive than others (my own caveat – the happy ending which awaits some of the gods' beloveds are not always particularly clear in the images themselves). It would be useful to have a clearer sense of how typical these examples and case studies are of the overall output of images on vases at the time. In his conclusion Hölscher says that he could have cited many other examples, but some tables setting out the shape of the evidence, and identifying the popularity of these particular themes in contrast to others would have helped to further strengthen the case. The author is also reluctant to state too clearly the mechanisms through which this interplay between theme and communal psychology works, rightly stressing that images both respond to and shape experience. Yet we are still left wondering about the factors at play – did vase painters respond to their own emotional fears and concerns, or to those of their patrons? Could some viewers see the same images differently, depending on their personal experiences, or were there any preferred, intended viewings for these images? How did the meanings of myths change in their differing contexts? I am reminded of Paul Zanker's discussion of the myths on Roman sarcophagi in the second and third centuries A. D., where we find the representation of a joyful afterlife juxtaposed with scenes of violent abduction and death (P. Zanker / B. Ewald, *Mit Mythen leben. Die Bilderwelt der römischen Sarkophage* [Munich 2004]). Both sets of material raise difficult questions about whether there is a general 'spirit of the age' or *Zeitgeist*, and how this can be theorised. Scholars will continue to debate the best ways to

approach these images, but essays like this one remind us to see works of art as products of their wider cultures and societies, and to explore how myths could act as a foil for human life, in all its delights and tribulations.

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