

Nikolaus Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Erzählung und Figur in der archaischen Kunst*. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz. Wiesbaden 1967. 28 Seiten, 12 Tafeln.

In this brief monograph the author seeks to elucidate some of the more peculiar conventions of archaic narrative art. Detailed treatment is reserved for two features in particular, both of which have to do with the archaic artist's conception of time: first, the practice of combining in one picture two or more successive incidents in the same story; and secondly, a tendency to characterise individual figures by attributes which are irrelevant – and sometimes contradictory – to the main action portrayed. Having described and illustrated these features with the help of several well-known scenes in sixth-century vase-painting, H.-W. attempts to trace their origin in Geometric art. Finally, he considers a few works of the fifth century, illustrating the sporadic survival of these conventions, in a period when it had become more fashionable to observe the unities of time and place in the rendering of narrative.

1. The 'time dimension' of archaic scenes is effectively illustrated by the Circe cup in Boston, presenting at least three successive moments in the Homeric story: (a) Circe mixes the potion; (b) Odysseus' crew are seen in various stages of metamorphosis; (c) Eurylochus escapes to tell Odysseus, who later (d) threatens Circe with drawn sword. However widely the painter may have wished to diverge from the *Odyssey*, there can have been no version of the story where all these actions were simultaneous. Yet there is some danger that the uncritical application of this theory might lure us into an erroneous assumption of uniformity between the archaic artist's version of a legend, and its presentation in later literature. A case in point is offered by the Theseus scene on the François vase, where Ariadne and her little nurse confront Theseus and his cheerful band of dancers. H.-W. seems prepared to accept the orthodox interpretation of the Crane Dance on Delos, into which Ariadne and her nurse have been introduced as a reminiscence of the Knossian episode. But surely some account should have been taken of the alternative interpretation by K. Friis Johansen (*Arkaeologisk-Kunsthistorisk Meddelelse* 3,3 [1945] 1 ff.), who postulates an earlier version of the story in which the dance takes place on the shore of Crete, and thereby makes the action of the scene rather more compact in space and time.

In tracing the origin of this temporal licence, H.-W. cautiously limits himself to the generic funerary scenes of the large Dipylon vases. Too cautiously, perhaps; for the more circumstantial Geometric battles are somewhat more enlightening in this respect. One need not be deterred, as H.-W. evidently is (p. 83, lines 4–6; cf. *id.*, *Marburger Winkelmann-Programm* 1961, 1–4), by a disbelief in their mythical content. On the famous oinochoe from the Agora (*Annual Brit. School Athens* 50, 1955, 40, fig. 1), the central figures under the square shield are clearly involved in (a) a combat followed by (b) a flight, whether or not one is prepared to accept them as the Molione twins. And an even more condensed narrative is depicted on a Dipylon fragment in Paris (A 528; cf. Chamoux, *Rev. Arch.* 23, 1945, 83, fig. 7), which would be hard to associate with any specific myth. Here a marine has just boarded an enemy ship, and threatens the crew; but in the act of drawing his sword, an enemy archer has shot him through the throat, and has had time to fit a second arrow to his bowstring. Thus, already in the mid-eighth century, we have evidence of a time dimension in narrative art, where two or more episodes can be compressed into the same picture with an astonishing economy of detail. And a similar multiplicity of events may be observed in several scenes of the seventh century, the age when the conventions of mythical narrative were being securely established. Witness the famous Protoattic Polyphemus, kantharos in hand, but already losing his eye; or the Protocorinthian aryballos showing the rape of Helen by Theseus and Peirithous, and the Dioscuri coming to her rescue (K. Friis Johansen, *Les Vases Sicyoniens* [Paris-Kopenhagen 1923] pl. 22,1c); or the vast Medusa in the Corfu pediment, already accompanied by her offspring, but not yet decapitated. It is surprising that this formative period of archaic narrative technique does not receive more attention in H.-W.'s monograph.

Side by side with his analysis of the time factor, H.-W. comments on the 'closed' character of many archaic narrative compositions, where the figures at the sides look inwards at the main action. The 'closed' form, in his view, is absent from Geometric scenes. These, on the contrary, often consist of 'open' friezes, e.g. with a procession of chariots all facing the same way; although episodic sequences, in the manner of Phoenician silver bowls, are sometimes found (e.g. on the Copenhagen kantharos, Davison fig. 128). Nevertheless – if I have rightly understood H.-W.'s conception of 'closed' form – it seems difficult to deny this quality to the *prothesis* pure and simple, as Davison figs. 1–2, 35–36, etc. And if a precedent for a 'closed' mythical scene is sought, I would draw attention to a Subgeometric oinochoe from Italy, for which a mythical interpretation has been suggested (*Bull. Inst. Class. Studies* [London] 15, 1968, 86 ff.) It must be confessed, however, that H.-W.'s preoccupation with 'closed' form somewhat obscures the main issue under review, since unity of composition has very little to do with unity of time or place.

2. As a further violation of temporal unity, H.-W. considers the convention whereby archaic figures may display attributes which they could not have possessed at the moment portrayed in the scene. For example, Paris, when confronted by the three goddesses, sometimes has a beard and a robe of state – features

unsuitable to a young shepherd, but prophetic of his subsequent life as a royal prince of Troy. For this phenomenon, too, precedents are sought in Geometric art (though not, strangely, in seventh century narratives; for the royal attributes of Paris the shepherd, cf. the Chigi oinochoe K. Friis Johansen, *Les Vases Sicyoniens* pl. 40). Thus helmets are worn not only by Geometric warriors, but by Geometric centaurs; in both cases, the helmet is interpreted as a 'hieroglyph' for prowess in combat. In more general terms, it is noted that nearly all standing Geometric figures have their knees flexed, even though they may be standing still at a p r o t h e s i s. By recalling the *λαυπηρά γούνα* of the Iliad, H.-W. reiterates the comparison with the Homeric epithet already made by T. B. L. Webster (*From Mycenae to Homer* [London 1958] 206-7). True, verbal epithets resemble visual attributes in that they may not always be relevant to the situation described; e.g., Achilles is still swift-footed, even when arguing with Agamemnon or sitting in Priam's tent. Yet one may doubt the wisdom of pressing the comparison too far. The epithet presents the most memorable quality of a man who is also named. But in early Greek art, the attribute is far more essential to the intelligibility of a scene; for it often furnishes the sole evidence for the recognition of a mythical figure, on the many occasions when no painted inscriptions are added. If, then, the main purpose of an attribute is to identify, one need hardly be surprised that it should illustrate a man's salient characteristic, whether or not it be relevant to the action portrayed.

In a small compass, the author has broached a large subject. The problems have been sensibly formulated, even if the answers are not always evident. If, in the end, some phenomena defy logical explanation (e.g. the bearded member of Theseus' retinue on the Archikles-Glaukytes cup), perhaps we should acknowledge that the conventions of narrative in archaic art cannot be reduced to a set of infallible and consistently applied rules.

L o n d o n

J. N. C o l d s t r e a m