
Die enge Verbindung des Poseidon mit dem Pferd (378f. 381f), die gut herausgearbeitet ist, macht ihn zum wichtigen Gott eines ausgesprochen zivilisatorischen Phänomens: der Amphiktyonie. Zu einer solchen konnten benachbarte, aber auch weit voneinander entfernte Städte gehören; die Verbindung geschah dann durch Reiter und Wagen. «Auf der Peloponnes sind es das achaische Heliike, das argolische Kalaureia, das triphyliche Samikon und das tainarische Poseidon, die im Zentrum eines Städteverbandes in Form einer Amphiktyonie oder eines Koinon stehen» (424). Der Verf. blickt hier wie oft über die Peloponnes hinaus, zitiert das Poseidonheiligtum im böotischen Onchestos als Mittelpunkt einer Amphiktyonie sowie das Panionion. Auf den Kykladen, im Nesiotenbund von Tenos, waren es weniger Wagen und Pferde als die ebenfalls zu Poseidon gehörenden Schiffe, die eine Verbindung herstellen. (Nicht das Poseidon, wohl aber das Panagia-Heiligtum von Tenos ist noch heute für Griechen in aller Welt ein Zentrum.)


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Greek narrative art has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention during the past two decades, bringing with it a range of approaches, terminology, and interpretations. Much of this work has been focused on particular problems, stories, or methodologies, with the result that there has not been a synthesis of the history and development of narrative art itself. Giuliani’s book is an effort to provide that overview.

G. begins with a discussion of pictures and poetry that draws upon Lessing’s distinction between description (Beschreiben) and narrative (Erzählen). He offers a critique of Lessing’s work, recognizing pictures are constructions that are not seen in a single, fixed glance and that do not always represent a single moment of time. Narrative must convey a sequence of events with plausible connections, and while it does not have poetry’s luxury of time to convey the beginning, middle, and end of a story, G. notes that the picture does have a middle and edges that can serve the same purpose.

In the following chapters, G. chronologically explores narrative imagery, beginning with the Geometric period (ch. 2). He discusses the Shield of Achilles as a model for representational images, maintaining this ekphrasis describes the world as it is, but does not constitute a narrative since its scenes are not specific. He applies this to the images on Geometric vases; there is no individual, no specific moment or place, no focus to the action, and therefore no narrative. The
scenes may show extreme situations, but they are not mythological and instead reflect on aristocratic life and ideology.

Pictures of the Trojan horse in the seventh century provide a specific setting by showing an unusual feature that requires an explanation on the part of the viewer (ch. 3). The pictures, however, still do not show a range of events and the figures are still generic rather than specific, with G. rejecting the identification of certain scenes on the Mykonos pithos as representing Helen and Menelaos or the death of Astyanax. Other images, like the blinding of Polyphemos, show only the result of action and do not explore cause and effect, leaving them short of the narrative threshold.

The need for identifying protagonists in a narrative picture is addressed by the adaptation of writing for labeling figures beginning in the middle of the 7th century (ch. 4). While many of the pictures like the judgment of Paris or the fight over Euphorbos are formulaic in their composition, the naming of figures requires the viewer to explain the picture and the action. Artists, however, are still limited in the range of actions that they can show. G. is particularly insightful in considering the choices that an artist must make in representing a story and for the differences between poetic and visual narrative. He reminds us that stories were told rather than read during the archaic period, with the result that artists and listeners did not focus on the small details of a narrative, but rather on the outline of events. In choosing to paint a story, the artist may be forced to use a formula that contradicts on the surface the details of a poetic account, but may remain faithful to the spirit of the story.

The artistic solutions for representing a sequence of events do not remain static (ch. 5). G. highlights the preference of some sixth-century artists for combining multiple moments and actions in a single ‘polychronie’ picture. As one moves into the classical period, one begins to see a change of strategy in the representation of stories like Odysseus and Kirke, the ransom of Hektor, and the death of Priam, from multiple moments to single moments, usually from an earlier point in the episode that emphasizes the interaction between figures and focuses upon their pathos.

The following two chapters (6–7) highlight further development in narrative images. G. notes the decline of vase production in Athens and its expansion in southern Italy in the later fifth century. A comparison of scenes like the wrath of Achilles and Orestes at Delphi shows that fifth-century Attic paintings are still the result of an oral culture, but that the south Italian vase paintings show a closer reliance on literary sources and a single moment of the story. He maintains that the details show that the artists are not basing their representation on a performance, but on a text in a shift from oral to written culture. After the end of vase painting in the fourth century, this facility with texts is found on relief bowls from the second century. Here the cups contain multiple scenes combined with lines from the poetic texts, including direct speech, with the result that narrative pictures offer a wealth of narrative detail concerning characters, the sequence of actions, and thought. These dense images were, as he argues, probably not based on illuminated manuscripts, but were a response to a specific clientele and market.
In conclusion, G. rejects the distinction of mythological and genre scenes, maintaining that pictures are first and primarily descriptive. Narrative images must be clear and unmistakable to move beyond description, a process that evolved over the course of centuries. Throughout his book, he recognizes the experimental side of iconography and the process of adaptation and creation by artists in responding to stories. He recognizes that artists are not illustrating texts within an oral culture, and describes nicely the impact that an oral poetic tradition might have had on listeners and artists, emphasizing the recall of the main narrative elements of the plot but not necessarily its details. Illustration is a later development, and his discussion of south Italian vases is a helpful contribution to an often-overlooked body of material.

There are, however, several elements that prevent G.’s book from fulfilling the need for a history of Greek narrative art. Almost all of the discussion focuses on vase-painting; while this forms the most abundant source of images, it leaves out of consideration public forms of narrative in architectural sculpture and lost media such as monumental painting. His approach to narrative is primarily iconographic, with the implication that artists are following poets rather than working within an independent narrative tradition within the same cultural traditions. While he constructs a model of poetic influence that is more plausible within archaic culture, it does not reflect the potential for an artist to create independently a narrative from traditional tales in the same way that poets do, arguments about the non-folk tale source for the Polyphemos episode of the ‘Odyssey’ notwithstanding.1 The distinction between description and narrative also limits the range of how narrative images work. There is, I would suggest, a distinction to be made between descriptive pictures showing a single figure, like a portrait, and those showing action. Action, as Roland Barthes articulates in structural analysis, is the essence of narration as embodied in the open-ended nucleus, and not the identity of the actors.2 Parables, for example, constitute literary narratives, even though they do not have nameable protagonists.3 G. is right to move away from the older division between myth and genre scenes, but there is still a distinction to be made between mythological narrative, non-mythological narrative, and descriptive but non-narrative action, a distinction that Anthony Snodgrass proposed for explaining the function of Geometric pictures as narratives.4

There is little consideration of alternative approaches such as semiotics, structural analysis, and reader response, either in general or with specific works.5

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1 On this question, see the discussions of A. Snodgrass, Homer and the Artists. Text and Picture in Early Greek Art (Cambridge 1998) and now J. P. Small, The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text (Cambridge 2005).
4 A. Snodgrass, Towards the Interpretation of the Geometric Figure-Scenes, Athenische Mitteilungen 95 (1980) 51–8. For the social function of these Geometric pictures, one should also consult J. Whitley, Style and Society in Dark Age Greece (Cambridge 1991).
5 Some omissions from the bibliography on narrative include C. Bérard, Iconographie–Iconologie–Iconologique, Études de Lettres (1983,4) 5–27; D. Castriota, Myth, Ethos, and Actuality. Official Art in Fifth-Century Athens (Madison 1992). For an earlier evolution-
Whether or not one chooses to use an approach like structural analysis, it would be helpful to have a clear definition and distinction of terminology and sources. G. uses terms like nucleus (Kern), index, structural nature, paradigmatic, micronarrative, and openness of action (Offenheit der Handlung) that are key elements of the language of structural analysis.¹ Some of these terms are colloquial and not limited to a single approach, but given their focused use outside of iconographic studies, their employment in this study should be clarified and distinctions from non-iconographic methods made.

There should also be a fuller engagement in the notes and bibliography of alternative approaches and earlier terminology for narrative, especially for the particular objects under discussion.

For example, the Boston kylix of Odysseus and Kirke has been featured in a number of theoretical discussions of narrative, particularly the discussion of the hieroglyphic character of narrative images by N. Himmelmam-Wildschütz and the definition of ‘synoptic’ narrative by Snodgrass.² Indeed, the lack of reference to other scholarly terms for multiple-moment compositions prevents aligning G.’s work with others. The discussion of the Naples Iliupersis hydria makes reference to the sack of Miletos in 494 as part of the socio-political context for that narrative, but does not reference the early discussion of that link by J. J. Pollitt or the suggested link to the sack of Athens by J. Boardman, and otherwise does not engage with other discussions of this important vase.³

G.’s study of narrative imagery is insightful and draws us back into considering the problem of its historical development. There remains, however, a need to synthesize a broader range of media, sources, and approaches into that project.

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¹ Most of these terms were defined by Barthes and other literary critics and have been employed in more structural approaches to pictorial narrative, such paradigmatic/syntagmatic by A. F. Stewart, Stesichoros and the François Vase, in: W. G. Moon, ed., Ancient Greek Art and Iconography (Madison 1983) 53–74. They are reviewed in M. Stansbury-O’Donnell, Pictorial Narrative in Ancient Greek Art (Cambridge 1999) ch. 1.

² See, for example, the fundamental discussion of A. Snodgrass, Narration and Allusion in Archaic Greek Art (Oxford 1982) 6–8 and more recently ‘Homer and the Artists’ (supra p. 538 n. 1) 57–62 (not referenced); Stansbury-O’Donnell (supra n. 1) 89–91.