

The life cycle of the archaic Greek warrior and hero. The interplay of myth and genre in imagery

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Introduction. Genre, narrative, motif and ideology

THE DISTINCTION between genre and narrative is not as sharp as one might think since both depend upon tradition shaped by cultural experience. The relationship of visual art and the normative background which gives shape to artistic tradition is an important topic which can take us far afield. The discussion in this paper will have to limit itself to one theme: the life cycle of the male warrior or hero.

The investigation will deal primarily with imagery on bronze Peloponnesian shields. The latter are particularly relevant to our topic because they are the carriers of male-oriented warrior ideology. Many of these shields were found in Olympia, others in Argos and Perachora, and it is agreed that they are products of an Argive school. Indeed Argos seems to be the source of the round shield.¹ It is even arguable that the epic cycle about Troy had an Argive origin.² At any rate, it is a fact that epic scenes on Corinthian³ and Argive pottery⁴ and shields⁵ are extensive.

Let us now turn to the decoration of the shields and some technical matters associated with the representation. Each shield was adorned on the outside with an *episema*, a device which the enemy would see. But also the inner bronze handle straps were decorated; they were divided into panels, and each panel contained a scene. These representations were meant to be seen by the carrier of the shield

1 Kunze 1950:215ff.

2 The epic is Argo-centric: Kunze 1950:216; Burkert 1998. The designation of the Greeks as Argives and Achaeans is not without significance, nor is the fact that Agamemnon and Diomedes, both Peloponnesian kings, are prominent leaders in the poem. Finally Athena and Hera, two patron goddesses of Argos are most prominent in the battles, whereas Poseidon is the patron god of Peloponnesian Helike and Aegai.

3 Amyx 1988. Especially interesting is the section on vases where the names of the heroes are inscribed and which give us an insight in the current epic tradition.

4 Recent discussion with bibliography in Snodgrass 1998.

5 Kunze 1950 and Bol 1989.

since they were on the inside. One wonders therefore if they had a didactic purpose. Let us note that the scenes were generated by matrices⁶ and, as Kunze has shown, the matrix determined the combination of visual motifs.⁷ It is possible that the matrix maker had a plan in mind when he chose from the pool of representations the six or seven that were to be included in each shield. We shall return to this issue; for the moment let us note that each panel was an autonomous unit, a 'motif.'

Did the panels have an inner coherence of theme? The issue of pictorial programmes (*Bildprogramme*) has been addressed by both E. Kunze and P. Bol.⁸ Neither of the two has found the rationale which determined the selection of scenes. These scholars could detect no connecting link between the panels.

If one were to ask a different question, however, namely *whether there was an ideology which connected the motifs*, then a different answer emerges. Each scene could be viewed as part of a meaningful conceptual and ideological frame, each myth constituting a paradigm. But what could this ideological web consist of?

Each culture emphasises that which is important to its survival. A warrior society will place value on the training of the young males with the purpose of turning out excellent warriors. Their career and identity are closely linked. They will be taught to value honour, accomplishment, an honourable death and funeral. Myths express the same values in a paradigmatic way. Thus genre and myth meet at an *axis* defined by social tradition: myth and genre express the same values. Thus, genre imagery can easily be turned into a specific story by the addition of a single inscription which specifies the name of the hero.

To return to the combination of motifs on bronze shields: if normative rather than narrative considerations determine the choice of motifs, the same scene could be used with or without minor alterations to designate many different characters and the message would remain the same.

Genre and myth on visual motifs: some examples

A typical scene is that of a warrior, his sword drawn and erect, moving to the left, leading a woman whom he holds by the wrist. This motif is usually identified as the abduction of Helen or the reclaiming of Helen by Menelaus⁹ (Fig. 1). Yet it could also refer to the capture of Chryseis, the abduction of Korone by Theseus or any other abducted woman or bride. For this reason, the generic designation

6 Few matrices are known, see Treister 1995:84ff.

7 Kunze 1950:215, 217.

8 Kunze 1950:49ff., Bol 1989:39.

9 Kunze 1950:163-67, form xi d; Schefold 1966: pl. 57 b; Bol 1989:74.

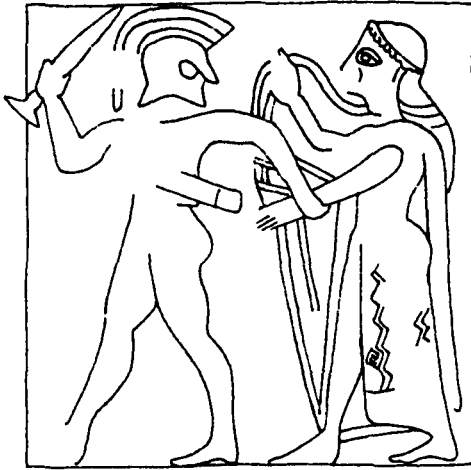


Fig. 1

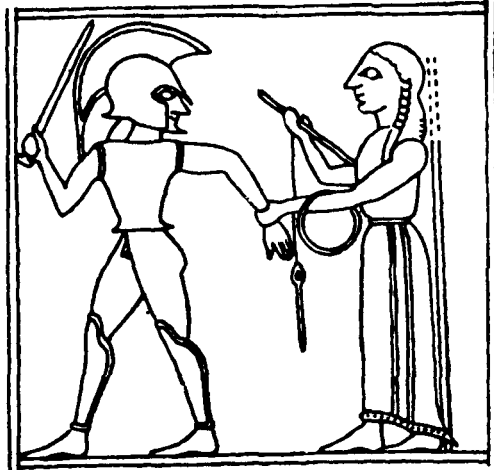


Fig. 2

'Brautraub' seems more apt to me.¹⁰ It addresses a cultural issue important to the Greeks of the Archaic age: abduction and accumulation of women contributes to the warrior's honor and shows that he is sexually active, having reached mature manhood.

Let us now change the meaning of this scene by slightly manipulating the gestures although we employ the same matrix-generated visual formula. If the woman grabs the man's wrist instead of vice versa (Fig. 2), the semeiology changes entirely. The woman tries to hold back the departing warrior.¹¹ The 'domesticity' of the woman is emphasised. She is a wife, rather than a bride to be. This is indicated by the spindle that she holds, the latter being a mark of wifely status. The message here is that the warrior must and will go to war and perform his duty despite the protestations of his wife. In narrative terms the couple may be Andromache and Hector but it could be any married couple. The normative value expresses the warrior's primary and most urgent duty which is defence of his country and the woman's reluctance to let him go because of her helplessness in the eventuality of her husband's death. The slight change in gestures is thus significant, a fact not always recognised by scholars who conflate the two formulas of Figs. 1 and 2.

10 Kunze 1950:160; Bol 1989:143, pl. 52.

11 Kunze 1950:166, (pl. 20, form v b) notices the variation of gesture but does not revise the identification of characters as Menelaus and Helen. Similarly Bol 1989:139, (form vii b) uses the same designation 'Brautraub' for both types of scenes on Figs. 2 and 3.



Fig. 3a



Fig. 3b

We can indulge in further experimentation with scenes of male-female interaction. In the scene of the departure of Amphiaraus, we know that the wife does not try to hold her husband back.¹² On the contrary, she has betrayed him. The artist expresses this visually by physically detaching the wife from the husband and by eliminating any gestures or contact between them.

Another formula on shield band decoration consists of a couple facing each other, the man grabbing the woman's wrist.¹³ The couple may be Hera and Zeus, Helen and Menelaus (Figs. 3 a and b), Hector and Andromache, or any other famous couple. The bond is sexual, emphasised by the presence of the lizrd which (being a magical determinative) arguably stresses the poignancy of the moment.¹⁴ Sexual union and marriage is an important stage in a warrior's career because it embodies the transition into the category 'mature man' as opposed to 'young warrior.'

Thus we have isolated three motifs dealing with gender roles, all of which help place the warrior's life in perspective. We have seen that the particulars of the story are subsumed under the normative expression of the 'motif.'

12 Boardman 1992:167-70.

13 Schefold 1966:85, fig. 32; Bol 1989:48-49, fig. 9.

14 The lizrd is a bad omen ('Unheil') according to Bol 1989:74. On the other hand, Grabow 1998:86 n. 28, allows for a greater variety of interpretations including regeneration because lizards grow tails back. This hypothesis is strengthened by the parallel symbolism in Egyptian amulets: Andrews 1994:32, figs. 28, 66. In Egyptian imagery the lizrd is a magical sign with positive connotations.

The life cycle of the hero

We now come to the central thesis of this paper: each scene on the shield bands focuses on a stage in the life cycle and career of the warrior, mythical hero, even a god. The stages range from the hero's adolescence to his death and are punctuated by accomplishments of various types: glory in battle, defeat of monsters or wild animals, the abduction of women, subjugation of the enemy or wild women, such as Amazons. There is also sexual union and marriage not because the latter are 'accomplishments' but because they signify transition into a new stage.

It should be noted, however, that the arrangement of the panels was not dictated by a chronological sequence of events as they might occur in a story; rather, they were chosen because of their relevance to the warrior's identity.

As an experiment, I have created an artificial shield-strap consisting of scenes taken from genuine shields. This artificial composition has a meaningful narrative sequence which reflects the hero's career and life. We shall see that this artificial strap has many common points with the *Iliad*.

Panel a. The rider (Fig. 4 a)

How did Greeks divide age groups? The early stages of the life of a Spartan citizen was in some ways identified with the *agoge* and death in battle was the end.¹⁵ The *agoge* starts at 7 and the (pre)military training takes place between 14 and 17. The formal age grades have names: *mikizomenos*, *propais*, *pais*, *mellereiren*, *eiren*. From the age of 20 there was formal membership in the army involving armour. The age of marriage was about 30. The *agoge* thus presupposed four distinct groups: the ephebe pre-warrior (sexually he is passive *eromenos*); the unmarried warrior; the married warrior; the old man (*geron*).

One series of pictorial motifs consists of young unbearded ephebe riders who have no armour, not being full warriors as yet.¹⁶ One shield panel shows an un-bearded youth trying to tame two huge horses simultaneously by holding both their reigns.¹⁷ Alternatively, a youth on horseback accompanies the armed warrior (Fig. 5).¹⁸ In this last instance we have a partnership of the ephebe with the full warrior. The ephebe is being trained for battle.

In Archaic Greek art, the ephebe is visually represented as a rider on horseback. He is naked or wears a *chitoniskos*; he has long hair (as opposed to the short hair in 5th cent. vases) and is beardless. In the *Iliad*, the ephebe is represented by Polydorus, and Lykaon, to the unfortunate fate of whom we shall return further on. In

15 The most reliable source is Xen. *Lac.* and Plut. *Lyc.* Overview in Pettersson 1992:78-90.

16 Lissarague 1990:205-210, 236, 238. For the imagery of adolescents: Schnapp 1985:101-125.

17 Kunze 1950:Beilage 13.

18 Kunze 1950:pl. 46, form xviii a.

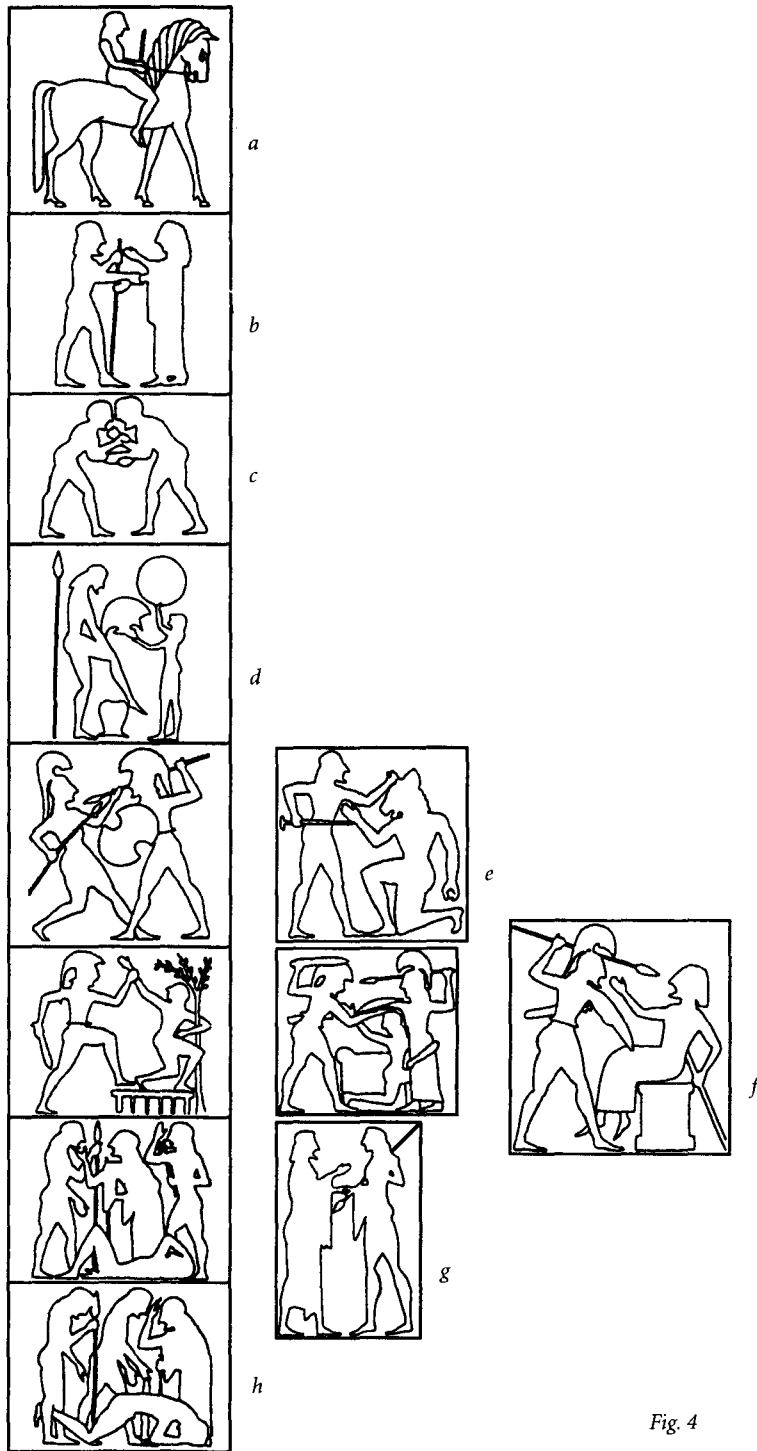


Fig. 4

the imagery of the shields, the rider is sometimes Bellerophon associated with the monster Chimaera; other times there is no monster and the rider stands for youths in general.¹⁹ It is important to note that the ephebe on horseback is never active as a fighter (Figs. 4 a; 5); even Bellerophon is not engaged in battle with Chimaera; the latter is there only as a potential opponent isolated in a panel below the rider, perhaps alluding to his future glory. In the epic tradition, the ephebe (Polydorus, Lykaon or Troilus) is a victim and his main role in the plot is to be killed by the mature warrior Achilles. Concepts of hierarchy and dominance within the *agoge* may have given rise to the myths where the adolescent plays a passive role; for myths are encoded cultural communication systems. The ephebe thus symbolises the aspiration to warrior status, an aspiration as yet unfulfilled which carries dangers inherent in the vulnerability of the youth. When the ephebe rises to the occasion by killing a monster, as does Bellerophon on the shield panels, the time has come for him to make the transition into adulthood.

Panel b. Marriage (Fig. 4 b)

As mentioned above, marriage is an important transition into manhood in the male's career. It signifies dominance in sexuality (as opposed to the passive role of the *eromenos*), as well as responsibility. That marriage was perceived as an important transition in maturation rites can be shown by the fact that scenes of couples appear on grave monuments in the 7th cent., as at Prinias.²⁰ As well, marriage imagery features on funerary urns of the Orientalizing period, as for example on one from Arkades, Crete, where a man touches a woman's cheek and lower abdomen.²¹ We have seen above that when a couple faces one another (Fig. 3) the significance is sexual union or marriage. The variant scheme, 'abduction' (Fig. 1) reflects a similar concept; here the emphasis is on the active role of the warrior. The abducted woman may become a wife (as Andromache) or may remain a mistress (as Ariadne, Cassandra, Chryseis, Briseis).²² Finally, the scheme 'warrior's departure' (Fig. 2) alludes to the warrior's responsibility towards his city. Marriage is thus emblematic of mature status, whether on the *stele* of a grave or on a shield.

The departing warrior is often but not always linked to the married warrior. Sometimes he shakes hands with an older man, presumably his father.²³

In *Iliad* 6 the scene of the departing warrior is represented by Hector. Andromache tries to hold Hector back in a moving speech which every schoolchild

19 Kunze 1950:pl. 70 ii c; pl. 72, vii a, viii c b; Schefold 1966:pls. 22, 40 b. Payne 1940:pl. 48. 11.

20 The social significance of the scenes on the grave monuments is argued extensively by Lebessi 1976.

21 Levi 1931:341, fig. 443 d.

22 Stewart 1996:74-89.

23 Kunze 1950:l. 35, form xi b.

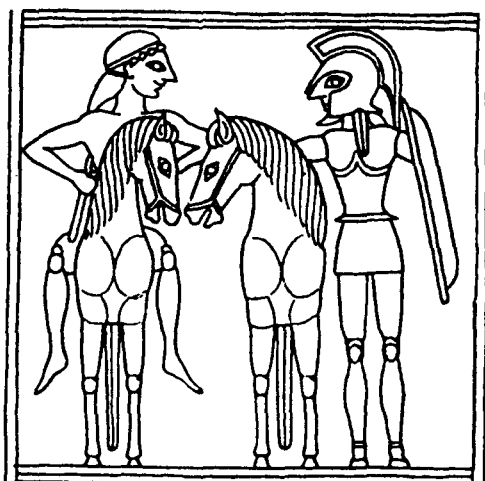


Fig. 5

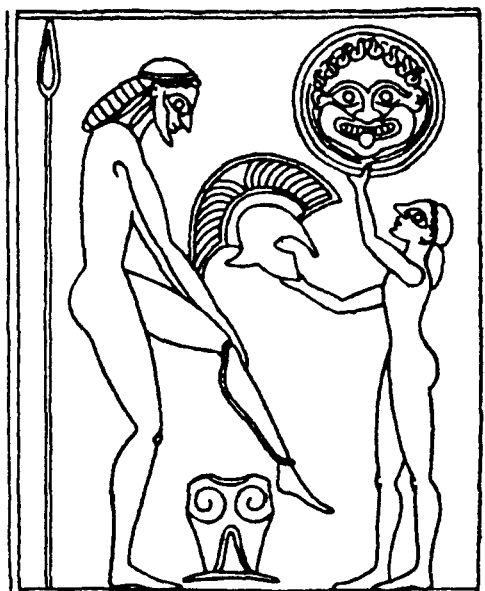


Fig. 6

used to know by heart. In some ways, Hector is the warrior *par excellence* because he is a defender of country and family rather than an aggressor. He departs for war with the consciousness that he may not return; nevertheless he has to fulfil his duty as a warrior and a leader. Compare with Fig. 2.

Panel c. Athletics (Fig. 4 c)

The warrior must also be an athlete.²⁴ We hear much about athletics in *Iliad* 22, the Funeral Games of Patroclus. On the shield straps it is boxing that is chosen as the epitome of athletic competition, possibly because it has a striking analogy to fighting. In the *Odyssey* athletics serve to establish Odysseus' identity as a superior man both at Scherie (Hom. *Od.* 8:186ff.) and at Ithaca in the boxing match with the beggar Irus (Hom. *Od.* 18:66ff.). Athletic training was of great importance in the *agoge*.²⁵

Panel d. Armament (Fig. 4 d)

Serious fighting is signalled by the ritual of putting on armour. On the shield straps the warrior bends his knee to put on one grieve whereas a helper is handing to him shield and helmet (Fig. 6).²⁶ The cuirass lies on the ground, the spear on the side.

²⁴ Athletic groups can be divided into classes of ephebes and mature men, *i.e.* warriors. Note that the contestants on the shield straps are bearded: Kunze 1950:pl. 47, form xviii e; more ambiguous Kunze 1950:form xlii b.

²⁵ Kennel 1995.

On early 6th cent. vases, the formula is repeated whilst secondary figures may be added: a wife or the father of the warrior. Sometimes even the patron goddess Athena or the helper Hermes are present.²⁷

Arming has more significance than meets the eye. It is a moment of choice during which the warrior has made the decision to fight and possibly to die. In the *Iliad* the procedure of putting on the armour is described at length for a good reason: it leads to glory but it is also a signal of the hero's approaching doom. Thus, Patroclus' armament marks the beginning of his end (Hom. *Il.* 16.131-137). Similarly, when Hector puts on the armour of Achilles, which he has stripped from the body of the dead Patroclus, he is about to experience his last glory.

'When Zeus the Cloud-compeller saw Hector from afar equipping himself in the arms of divine Achilles he shook his head and said to himself: Unhappy man! Little knowing how close you are to death Well, for the moment great glory will be yours. But you must pay for it. There will be no homecoming for you from battle ...' (Hom. *Il.* 17.194-207 trans. Rieu)

In Achilles' case, death is foretold to the hero by his divine horses after he has put on his new armour:

'Indeed my dreaded master, we will once more bring you safely home today. Yet the hour of your death is drawing near (Hom. *Il.* 19:408-409).

The scene of armament is thus more than just an instance of the warrior's preparation for war. It looks forward to glory, but at the same time, it signals death.

Panel e. Fighting (Fig. 4 e)

The major accomplishments of a hero can be divided into two groups: (1) defeat of monster (Fig. 7);²⁸ (2) defeat of opponent in war (Fig. 8). These two categories are interchangeable, and are chosen according to the literary genre. The monster (Fig. 7) fits the myth or folktale. The human adversary is appropriate to the epic hero (Fig. 8). Sometimes the human adversary is an Amazon as in Fig. 8. In this case, the hero asserts his male dominance over the untamed female.

Artistically, the adversary (be it a monster, an Amazon or a warrior) is depicted in a similar manner. Broken down with one knee bent, he/she is faltering whereas the hero is dominant.

Panel f: Quarrel

There is an important variation of the fighting scene which I have not included in my artificial shield strap. Two warriors face each other, their shields are clashing

26 Kunze 1950:form xi c.

27 Lissarrague 1985:63, figs. 63-64.

28 Kunze 1950:form iii, d, e; iv, e.

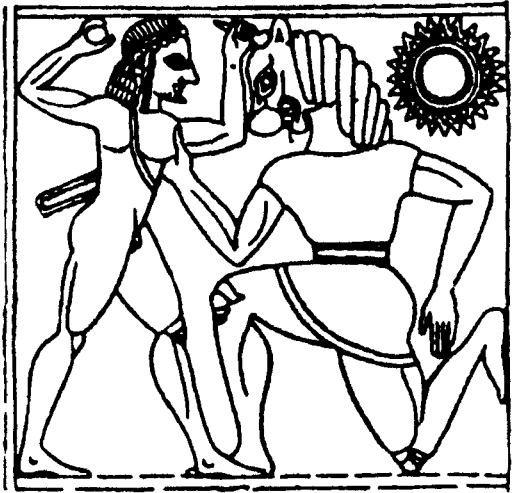


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

and their swords are drawn.²⁹ In their midst a bearded man raises his hand in mediation. Behind each warrior are two men trying to hold back their comrade (Fig. 9). Thus the fight is illegitimate, it must refer to a quarrel between members of the same party. The names are Lycurgus and Amphiaraus, the man in the centre being Adrastus. This episode must derive from the *The Seven Against Thebes* cycle, perhaps a lost literary version as Schefold suggests.³⁰ Lycurgus was king of Nemea, one of the first places where the Seven stopped and where baby Opheltes met his early death after being bitten by a snake. Amphiaraus is one of the Seven, so is Adrastus. We know there was a conflict between the Seven and Lycurgus. The conflict here is between equals. But there is also a second type of conflict which involves the conflict of generations. In this motif Achilles is normally the protagonist. There is a clear reference to a quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus in Book 8 of the *Odyssey* (Demodocus' song), a version not alluded to by the poet of the *Iliad*. Further, Proclus testifies to a quarrel between Achilles and Diomedes as an episode in the *Aithiopsis*.³¹ Finally the *menis* of Achilles is the central theme of the *Iliad*. It stands to reason that the motif 'quarrel' was not a unique invention of the poet of the *Iliad*. It was rather endemic to the heroic culture, a literary and visual topos, connected

29 Kunze 1950:pl. 45, form xvii e, p. 22; Schefold 1966:83, fig. 31.

30 Schefold 1966:83.

31 Stat. *Theb.* 4.652ff.; Rose 1958:191 with n. 31. Kullmann 1960:52-57; Andersen 1978:20-21.

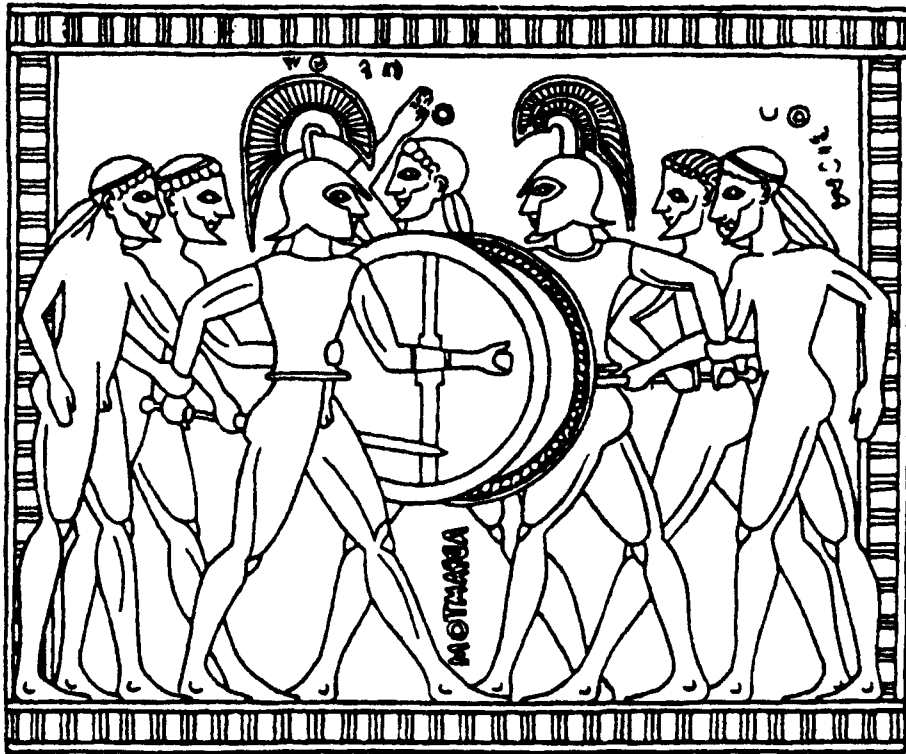


Fig. 9

mostly with Achilles (on account of his youth) but not exclusively with him. As a motif of epic tradition, its normative function may have been to serve as a negative paradigm: a warning against the possibility of civil strife which is dangerous for the internal coherence of the group.

Panel f. Killing of the defenseless (Fig. 4 f)

The important heroes in the *Iliad* reach a stage of uncontrolled rage, a '*menos*.' This means that they lose their sense of limitation and transgress mental and moral barriers.

Rage is not to be confused with *aristeia*, for not all heroes who excel in battle reach the stage of rage in the *Iliad*. Diomedes, for example, a most worthy hero, always acts properly; even when he fights the gods he is under the guidance of Athena.³²

But Hector and Achilles both succumb to excessive rage. Hector is in a state of rage (*menos*) from the moment he attacks the Achaean wall up until he kills Patro-

32 Andersen 1978.

clus and strips him of his armour (books 15-17). The poet talks of ‘the *menos* of man-slaying Hector’ (Hom. *Il.* 17. 638) and describes him as follows:

‘He raged like the war-god spear in hand, or like a fire on the mountains, working destruction in the deep recesses of the woods. There was foam in his mouth; his eyes flashed under lowering brows; there was menace even in the swaying of the helmet on his temples as he fought.’ (Hom. *Il.* 15.605ff.)

The imagery describes a man out of control best expressed by the fire simile. Later on, the rage takes the form of a moral transgression. Hector is prepared to commit an outrage on the body of Patroclus:

‘Hector stripped the body of Patroclus and wanted to behead him with his sharp sword and drag off the trunk, and give it to the dogs of Troy’ (Hom. *Il.* 17.125-127)

This rage signals the hero’s end:

‘Zeus himself was serving as his ally ... since he had but a short time to live. Pallas Athene was already speeding up the fatal day when he should fall to the mighty son of Peleus.’ (Hom. *Il.* 15.610-614)

Achilles’ rage is described vividly as he fights the river and chokes it with innumerable bodies of young men. Together with the words ‘*menos*’ etc., the poet uses the word ‘demon’ (Hom. *Il.* 21.18) to describe him. He chokes the river’s waters with human bodies.

Achilles’ *menos* is also expressed as a slaughter of youths, a topic with which I have dealt elsewhere.³³ It is not clear if Achilles commits a moral transgression or whether his act is a brutal expression of his biological superiority over the ephebe, a norm which was emphasised during the *agoge*.

The literary evidence first: when Achilles encounters the son of Priam, Lycaon, who is unarmed and naked (the poet specifies that he was ‘with neither helmet, shield, nor spear.’ Hom. *Il.* 21.50), he kills him and rejects his rather lengthy plea for mercy. He slaughters him by striking on his collar bone beside the neck. An analogy with a sacrificial animal cannot have escaped the audience, since Lycaon was not only naked but vulnerable because of his youth. Achilles kills also the youngest son of Priam, Polydorus, whom he pursues. Both youths fall victim to the more formidable warrior. Achilles kills another twelve Trojan youths by the funeral pyre of Patroclus: the poet comments that he contrived evil deeds in his mind (Hom. *Il.* 23.176).

We turn now to a striking analogy with the panels from the shields where the warrior is shown about to slaughter an unarmed youth or child (Figs. 4 f., 10 and 11).³⁴ There are two variant schemes. In one (Figs. 4 f and 10) the child has taken

33 Marinatos in R. Hägg (ed.), *The child in Greek cult* (forthcoming).

34 Kunze 1950:pl. 71 form i b; pl. 73 form xi a.



Fig 10

refuge on an altar and is looking backwards towards the warrior as though to arouse his pity. The warrior is in motion, his sword is drawn ready to be put into murderous use. This scheme reminds us of the killing of unarmed Lycaon and the twelve Trojan youths who were 'sacrificed' since the language of the poet suggests an analogy between unarmed youth and sacrificial victim. Visually 'sacrifice' is suggested clearly by the presence of the altar.³⁵ Another shield strap shows the child supplicating the warrior who is about to strike.³⁶

The other variant (Fig. 11) shows the warrior dangling a youth by his arm; the warrior is about to strike the fatal blow.³⁷ This position emphasises the dominance of the older warrior over the helpless state of the victim.

The warriors have been variously identified as Achilles or Neoptolemus. It does not really matter since the two are interchangeable figures fulfilling much the same role (after Achilles' death, his part was naturally played by the son).

Helpless victims include old men and women, besides youths. This act too is shown on the shield panels: the rape of Cassandra (Fig. 4 f) and the death of an old king.³⁸

Rage is the logical conclusion of armament and glory. It is the penultimate stage of the hero's cycle and the prelude to his end, although, in the *Iliad* at least, the death of the hero is not presented directly as punishment for transgressions. Achilles, for example, does not die because of his crimes. The outrageous acts can be seen as the culmination of the blood thirst that war excites in the fighter. Although not condoned, rage seems to have been accepted in some sense, since it explores the limitations of the warrior's taboos.

35 Morris 1995; Blome 1998.

36 Bol 1989:pl. 74, form H 57, a-b.

37 Kunze 1950:pl. 73 form ix c; xi, a.

38 Kunze 1950:pl. 71 form i c; iv b; pl. 73, form x c.

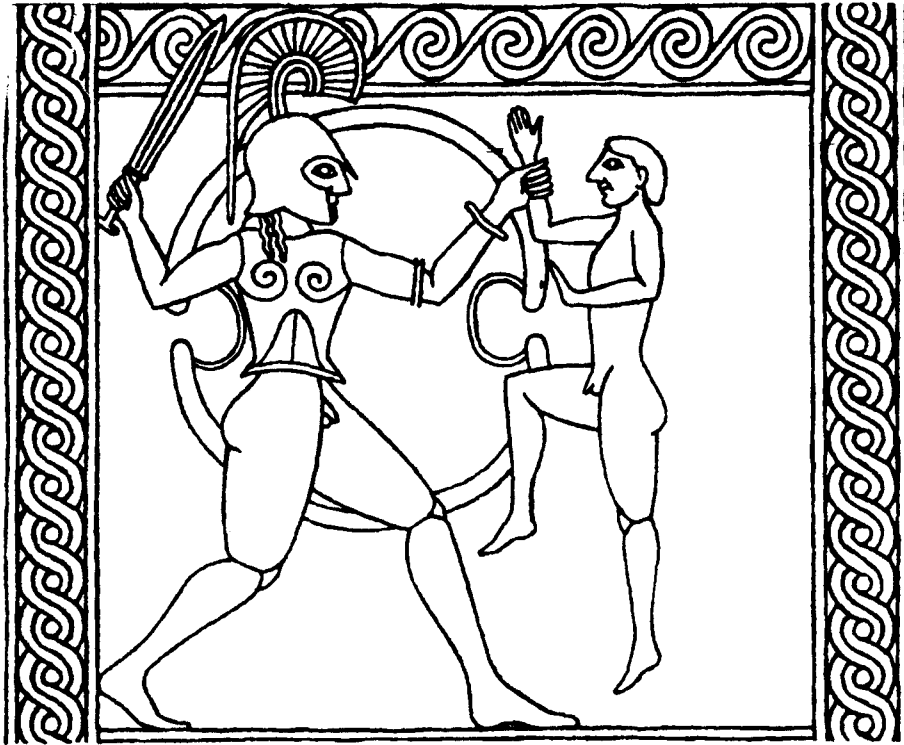


Fig. 11

One inherent trait in human beings is mercy. Yet the warrior may have to reject it. The rejection of mercy is met several times in the *Iliad*. Suffice it to mention two examples. Agamemnon advises Menelaus not to pity a pleading Trojan by reminding him of vengeance, a force that drives the warrior forward. Achilles rejects the plea of Lycaon:

‘Yes my friend,’ says Achilles to Lycaon, ‘ you too must die. Why make lament in such a manner? Even Patroclus died, who was by far a better man than you.’ (Hom. *Il.* 21.106-108)

Panel g. Mercy (Fig. 4 g)

Yet, the true Greek hero rises above vengeance and is capable of mercy. In the *Iliad*, the encounter of Achilles and Priam is the culmination of the development of the young man’s character. Compassion overrides all his other feelings, and the consuming vengeance is quenched when compared to the extent of human misery. Priam suddenly appears to Achilles, not as an enemy but as an old man, resembling his own father.



Fig 12.

The scene is paradigmatic, in my view, an exemplum of mercy and this is why it appears on shield panels. Priam is rendered as an old man, distinguishable by a long robe, pleading by touching the young warrior's chin (Figs. 4 g and 12).³⁹ On the ground lies a dead warrior, whose body is being negotiated. Behind the old suppliant is Hermes. The presence of the divine figure is not visual wordiness. It serves the purpose of establishing the legitimacy of the plea. Priam and Achilles are the protagonists here, yet the setting is not

what we find in the *Iliad*, for Achilles in the epic is seated indoors when Priam arrives and Hermes has already departed, whereas Hector's body is not present. The visual language on the shield reproduces the motif but not the exact circumstances of the *Iliad*. It stresses the vulnerability of the older man, slightly bent by age, and the ambivalent feelings of the warrior whose resolution is beginning to soften. Thus, the literary and visual tradition differ in details although they focus on the same subject.

Panel h. Death (Fig. 4 h)

The warrior dies in battle. He is always depicted as lying on the ground and is always naked. Nudity signals vulnerability rather than just heroic status, for reasons which will be discussed below. If he is on the stomach with bent knees, the warrior is not dead yet but in the process of dying.⁴⁰ If he is on his back, his soul has departed (compare Figs. 4 g and h). There is thus a difference between Ajax who has committed suicide falling on an erect sword (Fig. 4 h) and Hector who has been killed in battle and whose body is being negotiated (Fig. 4 g and 12). Both are naked.

In the *Iliad*, the vulnerability of the hero, who is about to be killed, is signalled by the gradual removal of his armour. Patroclus, for example, is hit by Apollo. The stages of his disarmament are exactly the reverse of the armament scenes. First

39 Kunze 1950:pl. 71 form iv f.

40 Kunze 1950:pl. 71 form iv c.

Patroclus' helmet is knocked off, then the spear is shattered in his hands; the shield falls from his shoulder; Apollo undoes the corselet on his breast. 'Patroclus was stunned; his shapely legs refused to carry him; and he stood there in a daze.' (Hom. *Il.* 16.801-806). It was mentioned above that, in art, the naked bodies of the dead heroes denote their vulnerable state.⁴¹

The death of the hero ends the cycle. On the shields, the mourning figures who beat their heads with their hand, allude to the funeral. I think that it is hardly an accident that the *Iliad* ends with the funeral of Hector. It is a fitting motif to bring closure to the life of a warrior and it may be argued that in some ways Hector embodies 'the' hero.

Conclusions

The motifs that have been investigated show a correlation between visual and literary tradition. They are mythological scenes but they are also generic, each representing a stage in the life of the hero. The choice of the scenes was determined by the norms of the Greek warrior culture. The important stages of the hero's life are defined by transitions from adolescence into adulthood, marriage, death. Also stressed are significant turning points, such as armament and killing. The outrage (or excessively violent behaviour) that a warrior may commit (and which military-oriented cultures inevitably accept) may be paradigms reflecting ambivalent values. The motifs on the shield straps depict not the glorious moments alone but the consequences of aggression. Killing of children, violation of women and murders of old men show that, under special circumstances, the warrior may transgress moral boundaries. Yet, the Greeks apparently possessed the ability of self-reflection (and this is precisely what the images on the *inside* of the shield are meant to do). The warrior looks at the straps in the handles of his shield; they are meant to promote his understanding of prototypes and roles (whereas the exterior images act as terrifying devices for the enemy). The scenes of pitiless murder are balanced by the possibility of compassion: Achilles does give in to Priam's plea.

The moments in the hero's life which are singled out in art constitute also the important structural blocks of the epic. The visual motifs apply to the crucial stages which both Hector and Achilles have to go through in the literary tradition. In art as well as literature, we may speak of motifs which are both generic and normative. This is the stuff that epic is made of.

There may be some implications for the chronology of the *Iliad*. The motifs were current in a particular chronological horizon ranging from the middle of the

41 The literary convention is of Near Eastern origin. When Ishtar goes to the underworld she is successively stripped of her clothes and ornaments until she is completely naked. Then she is hanged.

7th cent. to the end of the Archaic period. The brief glimpse that we get into the lives of two major heroes, Hector and Achilles, follows a certain rhythm. Arming for war; gaining glory; being in a state of rage; confronting the issue of mercy; becoming vulnerable by being stripped naked, meeting death. However, the uniqueness and quality of the personalities as outlined by Homer are his own. Moreover, the thoughts which Achilles expresses to Priam regarding what is human and indeed 'humane,' go beyond the simple language that genre imagery is able to express. They also go beyond anything that oral tradition could achieve. They are products of a written poem and remain the poet's own unique accomplishment.

*List of Captions**

*Please note that 'form' refers to matrix.

- Fig. 1. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Bol 1989:75, fig. 21.
- Fig. 2. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Schefold 1966:fig. 33.
- Fig. 3a Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Schefold 1966:fig. 32.
- Fig. 3b Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Bol 1989:174.
- Fig. 4. Artificial composite strap with selected panels from Olympia shields.
- Fig. 5. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:pl. 46, form xviii a.
- Fig. 6. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:form xi c.
- Fig. 7. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:pl.18, form iv e.
- Fig. 8. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:form v c.
- Fig. 9. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Schefold 1966:fig. 31.
- Fig. 10. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:form i b.
- Fig. 11. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:form ix c.
- Fig. 12. Shield strap panel from Olympia. After Kunze 1950:pl.19, form iv f.

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