

CHAPTER 5

Epigrams in archaic art: the 'Chest of Kypselos'

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The famous 'Chest of Kypselos', lost to us but described in great detail by Pausanias (Paus. 5.17.5–19.10), is exceptional among decorated monuments of the archaic period in a number of ways. First, the number of inscriptions, including hexameter epigrams in particular, is absolutely unique. Second, the sheer quantity of its images is remarkable, and outnumbered only by the Throne of Amyclae (Paus. 3.18.9–19.2). And third, the 'chest' offers a very unusual choice of subjects and iconographies.¹

According to Pausanias, the *κυψέλη/kypsele* (as he calls it) was donated by the descendants of the Corinthian tyrant Kypselos to the sanctuary at Olympia, where it was still to be seen in the temple of Hera during the second century AD.² This information fits well with the date of the monument, which is now agreed to be the 580s or 570s BC.³ The wooden container was decorated with five friezes or zones (*χώραι/chorai*) of wood, ivory and gold reliefs. The actual shape of the *kypsele* has long been debated but there is now a consensus that it was a round, barrel-like container whose name *kypsele* was only later transferred from the name of the tyrant to the monument (not the other way round, as the story has

¹ Earlier versions of this paper have been presented in Bonn, Heidelberg, Berlin and at the conference in Rauschholtshausen. I would like to thank the organisers for their invitation and all participants in the discussion for helpful suggestions and criticism. Special thanks go to Glenn W. Most and Richard Seaford for their stimulating comments (though neither agrees with all of the suggestions offered here), and to Elena Isayev and Lynette Mitchell for their help with improving my English.

² A different account is offered by Dio Chrys. 11. 45, who names Kypselos himself as the donor. However, even according to a low chronology for the Cypselids, the account is hardly compatible with the iconography of the 'chest'; see n. 3.

³ The date was first established by Payne 1931: 74 n. 4; 77–8; 125–43; 351 with n. 4. The chronology of Corinthian vases is a matter for debate but it seems that most scholars have accepted the dating framework suggested by Payne; see the discussion in Amyx 1988: 397–429. Most recently, Splitter (2000: *passim*) arrived at the same date based on his detailed comparisons between the images on the 'chest' and the iconography of vase images; for the history of scholarship on this see Splitter 2000: 123–60. Ivory carvings from Sparta and Delphi, which are very close to the 'chest' in technique, subject matter and chronology, can give a good impression of what the images may have looked like (Carter 1989, also summarised by Splitter 2000: 51–3).

it).⁴ The upper and lower *chorai* display mythical episodes or, more rarely, individual divinities. The middle *chora* is decorated with a continuous frieze showing two armies facing each other. The first, second, fourth and originally perhaps also the fifth *chora* (counted by Pausanias from the bottom) were inscribed with hexameters – some of them written *boustrophedon* – and with single names identifying figures and scenes. While the labelling of individual figures is quite common in this period, the epigrams are exceptional, and my intention here is to demonstrate that this feature is the most obvious indication, among others, of an unusually close relationship between a piece of art and poetry.

PAUSANIAS' ACCOUNT OF WORKS OF ART

Since the *kypsele* is no longer extant my following argument relies entirely on Pausanias' account. As this author has repeatedly been criticised as an unreliable source for the kind of research I attempt, it might be helpful to discuss briefly the arguments for his reliability in this particular case before approaching the actual question. Pausanias as a historical source has had a rather changeable reputation. For a long time, he was regarded as a kind of ancient Baedeker recording monuments, rituals and events objectively and according to autopsy during his own travels. While his literary style was usually frowned upon, the information he provides was regarded as extremely useful and taken more or less at face value. However, several mistakes and omissions did not pass unnoticed in modern scholarship, and by some he was harshly criticised for these flaws and suspected of drawing heavily on other writers' accounts which, in turn, would not necessarily be reliable at all. More recently, interest in the *Description of Greece* has shifted from using the work as a quarry for bits of information towards the work as a whole and the author himself, who has moved very much into the centre of academic interest. Scholars are now studying him as an important figure of the so-called Second Sophistic, stressing and also analysing his idiosyncrasies and biases. Jas Elsner was the first to suggest that we should read Pausanias as someone tracing what he believed would make up Greek identity, as someone writing a pilgrim's

⁴ Roux 1963; Splitter 2000: 15–20. Snodgrass' suggestion (1998: 109 and 2001: 128) that the *kypsele* might have been the original container in which Kypselos was hidden by his mother to protect him from the Bacchiadae decorated with images only in later generations seems rather unlikely both on technical and historical grounds, and seems to rest still on the assumption that the *kypsele* was indeed a rectangular chest (2001: 136, where he talks about its potential length).

account.⁵ Accordingly, Pausanias omits almost any notion of monuments or pieces of art later than about 150 BC.⁶

This recent interest in Pausanias, fascinating as it is, need not, however, rule out any reading of his work as a source of lost information, but should rather draw attention to the pitfalls of such an approach. While it would be very interesting indeed to know why Pausanias chose to describe the 'chest' at such length – it is the second-longest descriptive excursus in his whole work⁷ – the present author is interested in the object's original meaning, which is obviously beyond Pausanias' grasp.

Pausanias' shortcomings as a source of 'factual' information are primarily of two different kinds: first, omissions which appear to be due to a deliberate selectivity analysed with great success in recent scholarship,⁸ and second, mistakes, or rather biased accounts of historical events and other narratives which he heard from different people and read in other authors, and which again he chose to relate according to his own objectives. As for the merely descriptive parts of individual monuments, however, Pausanias can rarely be accused of any mistakes let alone of deliberate manipulation. In the case of Olympia, his description of the sanctuary matches the archaeological record very well so that there is no reason to doubt that he actually visited the site.⁹

As for the *kypsele* in particular, there is a discrepancy between his account and Dio Chrysostom regarding the donor of the votive.¹⁰ Yet this discrepancy concerns additional information on the monument (as is usually supplied by guides, or written accounts), not features of the item itself, and the same is true of the various interpretations of the third *chora* quoted by Pausanias.¹¹ In 5.18.1, he describes a scene showing Nyx, holding in her

⁵ Elsner 1992; Elsner 1994; Elsner 1995: 125–55; Elsner 2001, with special focus on Olympia. Elsner also reads Pausanias as an ethnographer, an idea developed further by Alcock 1996. For Pausanias as a historian see esp. Bingen 1996. Other important contributions along this line of inquiry include Arafat 1996, Alcock 2001.

⁶ On this see e.g. Bowie 1996, Arafat 1996.

⁷ Snodgrass 2001: 128 with suggestions on this question *passim*.

⁸ A good example is his conspicuous silence about the Nymphaeum of Herodes Atticus in Olympia, most probably due to his disregard for this monument. Cf. Arafat 1996: 37–8; 44–5; 198 for various possible reasons for Pausanias' omission.

⁹ This applies especially when we take his narrative strategies into account, cf. Elsner 2001. See also Pausanias' explicit note that he would not give the measurements of the Olympian Zeus based on any written account 5.11.9. Jones 2001 argues, moreover, that the expounders and informants Pausanias mentions so often were indeed local guides and people he met rather than written sources he consulted, and that they belonged to the higher and educated ranks of society. For a general discussion of Pausanias' alleged errors see Pritchett 1999: esp. 36–167, who largely supports the view presented here, as far as errors in descriptions are concerned, not those of interpretation, historical dates etc. Jacquemin 2001.

¹⁰ See n. 2 above.

¹¹ The same would also apply to his account of the fifth *chora*, where his interpretation of the imagery has been challenged by modern scholars, whereas there is no reason to doubt his description.

arms two children, Hypnos and Thanatos. According to his description, the former is white and the latter black, which has caused some irritation among scholars. Based on later representations of the two personifications where Hypnos is black and Thanatos white, they have accused Pausanias of giving a wrong description here, which, by implication, would raise suspicion about his reliability elsewhere.¹² However, there is no reason to assume that the colour symbolism of their skin has always remained the same, especially since in these later accounts Hypnos and Thanatos are different in other respects as well, for example in that they are adults.¹³

On the positive side, there is the actual way in which Pausanias discusses the monument. To be sure, the fact that he explicitly claims autopsy may be, in the time of the Second Sophistic, as much a hint that he is blatantly lying as an indication that he is telling the truth. On the other hand, he is quite precise in describing the direction in which he proceeds around the *kypsele* (5.17.6; 5.18.1; 5.18.6; 5.19.1; 5.19.7). Ironically, a real mistake by Pausanias arguably can be taken as the best support of the view that his descriptions at least are perfectly reliable. At 5.17.11, Pausanias describes two neighbouring scenes of the first *chora* showing the funerary games for Pelias and Heracles fighting the Hydra. According to Pausanias, Iolaus with his chariot is the winner of the chariot race at the former event. However, this would not only make a strange participant at the funerary games, not mentioned anywhere else, but based on common contemporary iconography we would also expect Iolaus to be present at the labours of Heracles. Due to a lack of framing lines between the scenes, Pausanias obviously misinterpreted the position of Iolaus whom he attributed to the wrong event.¹⁴ Yet his description is precise enough to help us not only identify his error as such but even correct it. Indeed, many of his descriptions are so detailed that they have been recognised by scholars as matching exactly the iconographical schemes typical of the 580s and 570s.¹⁵ In other instances he expresses his puzzlement over a piece of iconography he is not familiar with: 'Artemis (I have no idea why) has wings on her shoulders' (5.19.5); 'The Centaur does not have all four horse's hooves, but his front feet are human' (5.19.7). Thus, Pausanias appears to be both trustworthy and detailed as regards his description of the images.

With the inscriptions recorded by him, we are on slightly less firm ground. There is no reason to doubt that there were any inscriptions at all

¹² E.g. O. Waser in Roscher *ML* v, 499 s.v. Thanatos; Shapiro 1993: 132.

¹³ See Borg 2002: 117–18 for a more detailed argument. For Hypnos and Thanatos as children cf. Hes. *Theog.* 211–12; 756–9.

¹⁴ Splitter 2000: 46–50 with earlier bibliography. ¹⁵ Cf. n. 3 above.

or that Pausanias saw them himself.¹⁶ Firstly, only where he would have seen inscriptions is Pausanias able to identify the subjects represented. About the meaning of the third and fifth *chora*, both lacking inscriptions, he is obviously insecure. Secondly, there is ample evidence for vase painters of this period being particularly fond of adding writing to their images,¹⁷ and thus the same is likely to be true of relief designers, especially since the iconography used by the two different genres is so similar.¹⁸ Thirdly, the very kinds of inscriptions are not only commented on by Pausanias repeatedly and in great detail – something that is highly unlikely to be recorded in a collection –¹⁹ but they all appear on extant objects of the same time. Single names appear throughout in vase painting and longer inscriptions written in curvy lines including *boustrophedon* (5.17.6) are also particularly frequent during the first half of the sixth century, especially on Corinthian pots.²⁰ Verse inscriptions are relatively rare, but they do occur.²¹ We may also have to bear in mind that they are rather frequent on votive offerings in general although on these objects they usually refer to some aspect of the dedication.²² This may suffice for the moment as support for the view that the verses were actually there, and I shall argue below in more detail both why they are so numerous on the *kypsele* and why they refer to the images rather than the dedication as such.

Finally, we come to the uncertainties involved in the text of the verse inscriptions themselves. There are several minor mistakes as well as a few corrupt passages, which have raised the question of whether Pausanias would have been able to read the obscure archaic Corinthian script at all.²³ Habicht and others have put forward good arguments for the assumption that he could indeed read archaic Corinthian,²⁴ and there still remains the possibility that the copyists of the manuscript were responsible for any mistakes. Resolving this issue would require a new discussion of Pausanias'

¹⁶ Gallavotti 1978 and 1979 argued that Pausanias must have used existing editions of epigrams and inscriptions. Against this hypothesis see Habicht 1985: 48–51, Whittaker 1991 and, most recently, Chamoux 2001: 83.

¹⁷ Immerwahr 1990; Osborne/Pappas 2007 with further bibliography.

¹⁸ This can be demonstrated on a monument some fifty years later, the Treasury of the Siphnians at Delphi; Brinkmann 1994.

¹⁹ General comment: 5.17.6; location of writing: 5.18.2; 5.19.4; terminology: 5.18.5; metric 5.18.2; 5.19.3. Snodgrass 2001: 129 makes the same point.

²⁰ Wachter 2001; Osborne/Pappas 2007: esp. fig. 5.5.

²¹ Wachter 2001: *passim*, esp. Pt. II. 3 and 5; ad COP 85 with n. 482; §251 with n. 894; Osborne/Pappas 2007.

²² Osborne/Pappas 2007.

²³ For the various attempts at emendation see Fröhner 1892 and, more recently, Snodgrass 2001: 129–30, and comments below.

²⁴ Habicht 1985: esp. 149–51; Snodgrass 2001: 130; Chamoux 2001: 82–3.

texts based on the manuscripts available, and it would need a linguist's expertise as well.²⁵ None of these issues can be addressed here, not least because I am not a linguist. However, my overall suggestion about the relationship between the *kypsele* and literary texts does not depend on uncertainties of detail with regard to any single inscription. Moreover, it is based primarily on the content of *what* the inscriptions tell us rather than on particular details of their style and wording. Thus, I hope that it will turn out that it is still worth pursuing the questions indicated above on the basis of work done by others.²⁶

AGAMEMNON'S FIGHT AND THE HORRORS OF WAR

Pausanias describes the eighth scene of the fourth *chora* as follows:

Ἰφιδάμαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἀντήνορος κειμένου μαχόμενος πρὸς
Ἀγαμέμνονα ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ Κόων ἐστὶ. Φόβος δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἀγαμέμνονος τῆ
ἀσπίδι ἔπεστιν, ἔχων τὴν κεφαλὴν λέοντος. ἐπιγράμματα δὲ ὑπὲρ μὲν
τοῦ Ἰφιδάμαντος νεκροῦ·

Ἰφιδάμας οὗτός γα, Κόφων περιβάρναται αὐτοῦ·
τοῦ Ἀγαμέμνονος δὲ ἐπὶ τῆ ἀσπίδι·

οὗτος μὲν Φόβος ἐστὶ βροτῶν, ὁ δ' ἔχων Ἀγαμέμνων. Paus. 5.19.4

and Iphidamas the son of Antenor lies dead, while Agamemnon fights with Koon over his body. And Panic is seen on Agamemnon's shield, having a lion's head. The inscriptions are, over the corpse of Iphidamas,

'This is Iphidamas, Koon is fighting for him.'

and on Agamemnon's shield:

'This is the Panic that seizes men, and he that wields it is Agamemnon.'²⁷

There are multiple references to the epic prototype on which the image was modelled. First, the episode is taken from Homer's *Iliad*. The fight is described in book II, the *aristeia* of Agamemnon (II.248–63), in which it serves to characterise the leader of the Achaeans.²⁸ At first glance the defeat of Iphidamas and Koon appears as an unambiguous heroic deed; but a closer look indicates that it is a fateful event. Neither Iphidamas and Koon nor any of their kin and friends have ever done any harm to Agamemnon

²⁵ On the manuscript tradition in general see most recently Irigoin 2001 and Rocha-Pereira 2001 with further bibliography. Chamoux 2001 points out Pausanias' literary interest in epigrams but makes it clear that the author also takes them as a primary and particularly reliable source of information alongside prose inscriptions, and uses them both to verify (or falsify) oral and literary tradition.

²⁶ For the most recent critical apparatus see Pausanias, *Description de la Grèce*, vol. v (Casevitz, Paris 1999) ad loc.

²⁷ All English translations and the Greek text after Stuart-Jones 1894, who also provides critical notes.

²⁸ Cf. Thornton 1984: 78–80; Taplin 1990; Stanley 1993: 129.

or his people. On the contrary, their father Antenor once hosted the embassy led by Menelaus and Odysseus (*Il.* 3.203ff.) and, opposing Paris' party, spoke up in favour of Helen's return (*Il.* 7.347ff.).²⁹ Agamemnon's ignorance is complemented by his undue cruelty, which, in this fight, is highlighted by the fact that he not only kills Koon, who wanted to recover the body of his brother, but also beheads him over the corpse.³⁰

Interestingly, the depiction on the *kypsele* reflects the same ambiguity in the evaluation of the episode as the *Iliad*. The iconography of the scene itself corresponds to the very common type of two warriors fighting over a corpse. Its evaluation by the viewer certainly depends on his or her personal disposition but the most obvious reaction in this period would have been to interpret the scene as a positive example of heroic commitment.³¹ However, on the *kypsele* the artist has taken care to guide the viewer through the episode as it is depicted in the *Iliad*. This is achieved, firstly, by the very choice of the duel and its protagonists. Of all heroic duels, the artist has chosen one in which the hero is a very problematic character, and opted for a fight which not only questions the conduct of the victorious party but even points out the fateful side of war itself. In addition, this interpretation is not left for the educated viewer to arrive at alone but receives additional stress and support by the text accompanying the picture. Though it is not a direct quote from the *Iliad*, it is written in epic verse and refers to an event which, to our knowledge, is only recorded in this poem. Moreover, the 'caption' of the scene clearly speaks not about Agamemnon's fight but about Koon's: 'This is Iphidamas, Koon is fighting for him.' (Ἰφιδάμας οὐτός τε Κόων περιμάρνεται αὐτοῦ. Paus. 5.19.4), thus leading the viewer to adopt the point of view of Koon (and, in a way, that of Iphidamas), the perception, that is, of precisely those individuals who will not survive the fight and even suffer shameful mutilation.

The second hexameter refers to Agamemnon's shield device and encourages the viewer to take specific notice of it: 'This is the Panic that seizes men, and he that wields it is Agamemnon' (οὗτος μὲν Φόβος ἐστὶ

²⁹ Thornton 1984: 79–80. See Strassburger 1954: 69–72 for an analysis of the duels with a somewhat different result.

³⁰ In the *Iliad*, the *pathos* is increased by several references to Iphidamas' recent marriage. Agamemnon's cruelty is even more obvious in other duels (Stanley 1993: 128–36), of which none has ever been represented in the visual arts. Possibly, the fight against Koon was the most convenient choice since it could be shown in the well-established scheme of a duel over a corpse, while other scenes would have been much more difficult to depict. On the character of Agamemnon cf. Bassett 1934 and Taplin 1990. On beheading as an act of cruelty: Segal 1971: 20–1; Vernant 1982; Lendon 2000.

³¹ Borg 2006.

βροτῶν, ὁ δ' ἔχων Ἀγαμέμνων. Paus. 5.19.4). Again, the reference to the *Iliad* is apparent not only in the hexameter form of the inscription but also in its content. At the beginning of book II, Agamemnon's arming of himself for the battle, in which Iphidamas and Koon will be killed, is described in some detail. Here, Phobos figures on Agamemnon's shield as well but he is accompanied by two other frightening daemons, Gorgo and Deimos. Although the shield on the 'chest' has just one of these monsters the parallel must be more than just chance when we take into account the varying conditions and conventions of the two different media. Three figures (and their inscriptions) would hardly have found enough space on the shield of the 'chest' and would have been either less comprehensible or less detailed in their implications and meaning.³² In the case of the *Iliad*, naming the individual monsters will have been an effective means of stimulating the imagination of the audience, each additional name an additional horror. In the image, however, it is exactly the restriction to a single figure shown in detail which would bring its frightening character to the fore. The predator's head given to Phobos demonstrates his dreadful character as dramatically as needed – and what could the other daemons have added? This interpretation seems to be supported by literary evidence as well, where Deimos is only mentioned in connection with his brother Phobos while Phobos also appears alone.³³ Accordingly, Phobos on the *kypsele* would be a summary of the images on the *Iliad* shield prompted by the necessities of a different medium.

However, the hexameter and the choice of the shield device are more than just references to a famous poem. Phobos is not only a shield device but also an attribute of Agamemnon himself. The epigram draws no attention to the fact that Phobos is an image but rather relates him directly to this hero. Indeed the noun *phobos* has an active as well as a passive aspect to it. The active sense is the ability to cause fear, φοβεῖν, common with gods and heroes alike; the passive one is flight but, to some extent already in Homer, also the psychological state of fear causing flight.³⁴ Agamemnon's attribute of Phobos, which he can use like a shield, characterises him as someone who, like Ares, possesses the power *phobein* and thus can trigger *phobos*, panic, flight and fear.³⁵ This power, or rather its effect, the

³² Splitter 2000: 22; 42–3 on the size of the shield and the placing of the inscription on its edge.

³³ E.g. Hom. *Il.* 9,1–2; 13,299; cf. Shapiro 1993: 208.

³⁴ Gruber 1963: 15–39; Erbse 1986: 29–34, who refers to the passive aspect of flight and fear only.

³⁵ I am grateful to Cornelis Bol who reminded me of depictions of shields on vases, where the shield devices seem to leap out of the shield like real animals or daemons attacking the opponent; see examples in Kaeser 1981: 127 n. 232–5.

Trojans' flight in panic, also is a recurrent motif in book 11 of the *Iliad* (11.120–1; 158–9; 178) and seems to have inspired the unique iconography of Phobos in ancient art.³⁶ Indeed, Agamemnon is compared with a lion remarkably frequently and extensively (11.113–14; 129–30; 172ff.; 239). One instance where the simile is used is in the fight against Iphidamas (11.239), when the Trojans fleeing from Agamemnon in panic are compared explicitly with a deer in 11.113–21 and with cattle in 11.172–8 fleeing from a lion. The shield and its device Phobos thus evoke a characterisation of Agamemnon which is central to his *aristeia* and to his terrifying personality.³⁷

The two hexameters which may at first appear to be providing some basic information actually draw attention to two central aspects of the episode, which guide the viewer in the same direction as the *Iliad* does and, I would maintain, extend their meaning as a comment on the complexities of warfare in general. Although referring to one of the greatest heroes of the *Iliad*, by focusing on the names – and the personality – of the victims instead of the victor of the fight, the first hexameter reminds the reader/viewer of 'all the bitterness of war',³⁸ while Phobos becomes the horror of combat and warfare itself to which Koon and Iphidamas fell victim and which they confirm by their undeserved (type of) death.³⁹

The image described above combines three strategies of making reference to a poetic work or, more precisely, to an epic. Arguably the most obvious strategy is the use of hexametrical epigrams; another is the adaptation of a particular episode and choice of protagonists. The third is not a direct reference to literature or even a particular poem but rather the adaptation of a literary mode of expression: the introduction of a personification, Phobos, as an allegorical commentary on Agamemnon and the events he is involved in.⁴⁰ In no other scene on the 'chest' do we find all three strategies employed at the same time. However, the techniques themselves are quite common and will be briefly illustrated here with some further examples.

³⁶ On other images of Phobos, all in the iconography of a charioteer, cf. *LIMC* VII (1994) 393–4 s.v. Phobos (J. Boardman); Shapiro 1993: 208–15; Borg 2002: 143–5.

³⁷ On lion similes in general see Schnapp-Gourbeillon 1981: esp. 38–48; 72–3.

³⁸ Strassburger 1954: 127.

³⁹ Cf. Thornton 1984: 78–80: 'The pathos of the blind destructiveness of war, suggested by the "gleaming chest" of the first pair killed, by the second pair having been caught and ransomed before, by the third pair dooming themselves to death by their very appeal for mercy, reaches its climax in Agamemnon's killing the sons of Antenor in ignorance.'

⁴⁰ I have shown elsewhere (Borg 2002: *passim*) that this is a literary device used in real images only in later periods and even then rarely.

EPIGRAMS

Eight scenes on the *kypsele* have epigrams inscribed, four each in *chorai* two and four:

Scene II 4, Return of Marpessa by Idas (5.18.15–16):

Ἴδας Μάρπησαν καλλίσφυρον, ἄν φοί Ἀπόλλων
ἄρπασε, τὰν Εὐανοῦ ἄγει πάλιν οὐκ ἀφέκουσαν.⁴¹

Idas leads back again Marpessa of the fair ankles, whom Apollo stole from him, the daughter of Euenos, nothing loth.

Scene II 7, Marriage of Jason and Medea (5.18.25):

Μήδειαν Ἰάσων γαμέει, κέλεται δ' Ἀφροδίτα.

Jason weds Medea at Aphrodite's behest.

Scene II 8, Apollo and the Muses (5.18.28–9):

Λατοΐδας οὐτός γα φάναξ φεκάφεργος Ἀπόλλων
Μούσαι δ' ἀμφ' αὐτὸν, χαρίζεις χορός, αἴσι κατάρχει.

This is Leto's son, King Apollo that smithes from afar; and about him are the Muses, a goodly choir, whom he leads.

Scene II 9, Atlas and Heracles (5.18.36):

Ἄτλας οὐρανὸν οὗτος ἔχει, τὰ δὲ μᾶλα μεθήσει.

This is Atlas who upholds the heaven, but the apples he shall give up.

Scene IV 7, The Dioscuri return Helen (5.19.19–20):

Τυνδαρίδα Ἐλέναν φέρετον, Αἴθραν δ' ἔλκε(ῖ)τον Ἀθάναθεν.⁴²

The sons of Tyndareus are bearing Helen away, and dragging Aithra from Aphidna.

⁴¹ All MSS equally give the second line as: ἄρπασε, τὰν ἐκ ναοῦ πάλιν ἄγει οὐκ ἀφέκουσαν, which does not fit the metre. The emendation by Fröhner 1892: 291 is widely accepted today, not least because the position of the patronymic is not rare in archaic inscriptions. Snell's correction of the name to Εὐεανοῦ, modelled on Bacchylides, seems to have been largely ignored (Snell 1952: 160 n. 1). For Robert's suggestion cf. n. 44 below.

⁴² This is the transmitted text in all of the manuscripts. Stuart-Jones 1894: 76–7 and others have regarded the passage as corrupt because of alleged difficulties with the metre and made various attempts at emendation. Gallavotti 1978: 12–13 argues, however, that the manuscript transmission is genuine and that Pausanias' (as well as the modern philologists') puzzlement about the metre results from unfamiliarity with a metre which is similar to that of Stesichorus, a dactylo-anapaestic tetrapody and a anapaestic dimeter. The reading is accepted in Pausanias, *Description de la Grèce*, tome v (Paris 1999) ad loc.

Scene IV 8, Duel between Agamemnon and Koon: see above.

Scene IV 9, Judgment of Paris (5.19.32–3):

Ἑρμείας ὄδ' Ἄλεξανδρῳ δείκνυτι διαιτῆν
τοῦ φείδεος Ἥραν καὶ Ἀθάναν καὶ Ἀφροδίταν.

This is Hermes who shows to Alexander for trial of beauty Hera and Athena and Aphrodite.

Scene IV 11, Ajax and Cassandra (5.19.39):

Αἴφας Κασάνδραν ἀπ' Ἀθαναίας Λοκρὸς ἔλκει.

Ajax the Locrian drags Cassandra from Athene.

Not one of the epigrams is a quote from any literary text known to us, and the deictic character of most of them renders it very unlikely that they would be quotes from lost poetry. Rather, the epigrams seem to have been created specifically for the *kypsele*. This is confirmed by the few cases which we can test against their otherwise most likely literary source. The one case is the duel between Agamemnon and Koon which clearly depends on the *Iliad* but features two hexameters which make no linguistic reference to the epic at all. The second case is the epigram of the Atlas scene. Its first part shows such a close parallel to Hes. *Theog.* 517 that a direct dependence on it seems likely:⁴³

Ἄτλας οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχει κρατερῆς ὑπ' ἀνάγκης.

And Atlas through hard constraint upholds the wide heaven.

Choice and order of words are close enough to suggest a deliberate link; however Hesiod was not quoted exactly but with intentional variation. While Hesiod focuses on the burden of heaven, the *kypsele* suggests that, rather than handing over this burden, Atlas had to hand over the apples of the Hesperids, which he would surely have preferred to keep.

A connection between the epigram in the Idas-Marpessa scene and Hom. *Il.* 9. 557 (κούρη Μαρπήσσης καλλισφύρου Εὐηνίνης) suggested by some is much less obvious. Robert emends the first verse of the epigram to Ἰδας Μάρπησαν καλλίσφυρον Ἐυανίαν but succumbs to circular reasoning by first suggesting a close relationship with the verse in the *Iliad* and then finding it supported by his emended text.⁴⁴ Also the emendation ends in an *aporia* since he cannot complete the second verse

⁴³ Robert 1888: 140 n. 3. ⁴⁴ Robert 1888: 140.

of the epigram with the remaining parts. The adjective καλλίσφυρος is clearly epic but quite common and does not seem to support sufficiently the hypothesis that the epigram on the *kypsele* derives from this specific epic verse.

For the other epigrams, no relation to any particular lines of poetry can be established – if ever there was one. The marriage of Jason and Medea was probably treated in a lost *Argonautica* by Eumelus.⁴⁵ It seems to have been a local, Corinthian variant of the story of Medea which is otherwise unknown. Nevertheless, since the iconography of the relief is not specific, it is impossible to know whether the scene was inspired by Eumelus' epic or rather by a common local narrative tradition. There is a scene with Apollo and the Muses on the Shield of Heracles in the pseudo-hesiodic *Aspis* (vv. 200–2) described, however, in different words. The first abduction and return of Helen was narrated probably by Alcman and, according to a scholion, in the Epic Cycle. Yet the first surviving account of it is Herodotus 9.73. Therefore we cannot check any relationship between the epigram and/or scene and contemporary poetry. Since the epigram is also hopelessly corrupt, there would in any case be a severe danger of falling into a similar trap of circular reasoning as Robert did with the Idas-Marpessa scene. For the epigrams on the Judgment of Paris and Ajax and Cassandra, all possible poetic parallels are again lost, but any close connection to poetry seems highly unlikely from the start because of their deictic and very simple character.

The epigrams also differ in terms of their impact on the interpretation of the images. In some cases they provide essential factual statements, in others they guide the viewer's interpretation and evaluation of an episode, while in some they do not seem to add anything except their form. The epigram of the Idas-Marpessa scene provides the names of the protagonists while the common iconography of leading a woman/bride would not suffice to identify the characters. It also draws attention to a crucial point of the story which is not visible at all, the fact that Marpessa had been previously abducted by Apollo, and that Idas succeeded in winning her back. In the context of the following four scenes, which we can read as variations on the theme 'winning a bride', these details obviously were important. In this scene, a mortal wrests a woman from a god, while in the neighbouring scene with the cunning seduction of Alcmena by Zeus it is the other way round. The Jason and Medea epigram fulfils a similar function. A crucial aspect of the marriage is apparently the subtle power of Aphrodite arranging for the

⁴⁵ Huxley 1969: 60–79; testimonia and fragments now in West 2003: 200–49.

union, while in the adjacent scene the return of Helen is achieved by violent force. Again, none of the scenes would be recognisable without the inscriptions.

The Atlas scene could certainly be identified without the epigram but in this case the viewer's attention is drawn to the loss of the apples, which he would have liked to keep while still retaining the burden of heaven. The epigrams of Apollo and the Muses, of the Judgment of Paris and of Ajax and Cassandra just confirm the obvious. But these last examples in particular, as well as the lack of sophistication in the majority of the epigrams, make it clear that the important thing is not just information and content but also form, a form that could hardly be more clearly related to (epic) poetry.

ADOPTIONS OF EPIC SUBJECTS AND PROTAGONISTS

It is probably fair to assume – though not verifiable in every single case – that all episodes depicted on the 'chest' were treated more or less extensively in at least one poetic work existing at the time the 'chest' was created.⁴⁶ To support such a claim, which however has no implications for any direct dependence of any of the images on any specific piece of poetry,⁴⁷ we would need to look for a scene that is either unique to a specific text and its narrative strategy (like the duel between Agamemnon and Koon), or a scene showing a common event but offering an interpretation which is unique to a particular text. Both appear to be true for scene IV 5:

The duel between Ajax and Hector

μονομαχοῦντος δὲ Αἴαντι "Ἐκτορος κατὰ τὴν πρόκλησιν μεταξὺ
ἔστηκεν αὐτῶν "Ἐρις αἰσχίστη τὸ εἶδος. Paus. 5.19.2

Ajax is engaged in single combat with Hector in pursuance of his challenge, and between them stands Eris hideous to look on.

The subject is common in archaic art and is depicted from the last quarter of the seventh century on Corinthian vases, later also on Athenian ones.⁴⁸ But the scene on the 'chest' differs from all the other images by showing Eris, most repulsive (αἰσχίστη), between the heroes. The episode is narrated in *Iliad* 7.207–82 but Eris is not present there either. Rather, the divine driving

⁴⁶ Exceptions are the allegorical scenes II 1–3 and 10 and the single figures IV 10 and 13.

⁴⁷ On the problem see Snodgrass 1998; Giuliani 1998.

⁴⁸ LIMC I (1981) 312–36, esp. 319–21 nos. 33–50 s.v. Aias 1 (O. Touchefeu); Splitter 2000: 41–2.

forces behind the fight are Athena and Apollo (7.37–42), and their intention is to end all fighting for this day. The scene on the ‘chest’, therefore, is not an exact illustration of the text. The idea of adding Eris to the familiar scene must have resulted from the desire to stress explicitly the aspect of strife within the episode.

To be sure, it is hardly surprising that a duel would mean *eris* in the sense of belligerence, strife, discord etc.⁴⁹ But the depiction of a duel between heroes is always to some extent ambivalent. While the aspect of strife will never be missing, such a fight can and will often be perceived as an example of heroic courage or – in this particular case – even of self-sacrifice of an individual hero for his troops. Thus, Eris is not tautological but guides the understanding of the image in one particular direction, which is chosen from several alternatives. While not present in person, it is exactly this aspect of *eris* which figures prominently in the *Iliad* as well. It appears at the beginning of the episode where Zeus is called the initiator of strife and combat between the two armed forces (*Il.* 7.210). At the end of the episode, the motif is taken up again where Hector contrasts *eris* as *the* characteristic feature of combat with the friendly reconciliation after the duel’s end in a draw (*Il.* 7.301: ἡμὲν ἐμαρνάσθη ἔριδος πέρι θυμοβόροιο, ἦδ’ αὐτ’ ἐν φιλότῃ διέτμαγεν ἀρθμήσαντε, transl. S. Butler ‘The twain verily fought in rivalry of soul-devouring strife, but thereafter made them a compact and were parted in friendship’). ἔρις θυμοβόρος, ‘soul-devouring strife’, marking both the beginning and the end of the duel, thus becomes the motivation as well as the primary characteristic of the action. Without being personified explicitly, *eris* still is presented as an independent force affecting the mortals and driving them to fight.

Whether or not we consider it likely that the same episode was narrated in other contexts and/or epics, the unique emphasis on *eris* on the ‘chest’ suggests a direct connection between the image and the *Iliad*, which can be further supported by looking at the evaluation of the event in both image and text. On the *kypsele*, Eris is clearly negative. According to Pausanias, Eris is αἰσχίστη, most repulsive, a characterisation clearly referring to her physical features in the first place. When we take the figure as a comment on the scene, however, the feature turns into a metaphor characterising strife itself as a repulsive event or condition. In the image on the ‘chest’, detached from its narrative context, the iconography of Eris is used to trigger an evaluation of the action closely matching that of the *Iliad*. There, the fight is

⁴⁹ Gruber 1963: 40ff., who notes 54–5 that the original meaning ‘fight’, which would fit our context as well, is rather rare after Homer.

clearly not narrated as a positive event either, even though it ends with Ajax and Hector exchanging gifts. Rather, it is 'an empty paradigm of the heroic code'⁵⁰ since from the outset it is predetermined that the duel will lead to no result: Athena and Apollo have initiated it only to end the atrocities of the one day, not to bring about an end of the war as the two heroes are made to believe.⁵¹

In two other cases, it is the iconography of the figures that seems to depend on literary sources:

Ker in the duel between Eteocles and Polynices

τῶν δὲ Οἰδίποδος παίδων Πολυνεΐκει πεπτωκότι ἐς γόνυ ἔπεισιν Ἑτεοκλῆς. τοῦ Πολυνεΐκου δὲ ὀπισθεν (γυνῆ) ἔστηκεν ὀδόντας τε ἔχουσα οὐδὲν ἡμερωτέρους θηρίου, καὶ οἱ καὶ τῶν χειρῶν εἰσὶν ἐπικαμπεῖς οἱ ὄνυχες· ἐπίγραμμα δὲ ἐπ' αὐτῇ εἶναι φησι Κῆρα, ὡς τὸν μὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ πεπρωμένου τὸν Πολυνεΐκην ἀπαχθέντα, Ἑτεοκλεῖ δὲ γενομένης καὶ σὺν τῷ δικαίῳ τῆς τελευτῆς. Paus. 5.19.6

Of the sons of Oedipus, Polynices has fallen on his knee, and Eteocles advances upon him. And behind Polynices stands a female figure with tusks as terrible as a beast's, and hooked talons on her hands, and the inscription beside her says that she is a Ker – meaning that fate has snatched Polynices away, and that Eteocles, too, justly met his doom.

The duel and its surrounding events have not been preserved in any archaic text so that we cannot check whether Ker in this particular scene could have been stimulated by poetry (the best candidate would be the lost *Thebais*). On the other hand, Ker as a character and her specific iconography are unique in the visual arts, while she appears in archaic poetry more than once.⁵² All other (and later) representations of Keres in art do not show the female daemon but personifications of individual fates of death, which only appear in scenes of *psycho-* or *kerostasiai*.⁵³

On the 'chest' however, Ker is the personification of a violent, fatal destiny and death in the iconography of a frightful daemon like the ones appearing in Homer and on the shield of Heracles, who in the middle of combat snatch for corpses and the wounded. While the Keres of the

⁵⁰ Stanley 1993: 95.

⁵¹ For a different view see Snodgrass 1998: 112 who regards Eris as 'not particularly appropriate'.

⁵² *LIMC* VI (1992) 14–23 s.v. Ker (R. Vollkommer). The identification of other daemonic creatures on vases with Ker is rejected with good reason by Vollkommer *ibid.* and Vollkommer 1991; on the unique scene on the 'chest' cf. also Splitter 2000: 44–5.

⁵³ *LIMC* VI (1992) 14–23 s.v. Ker (R. Vollkommer); Bremmer 1983: 113–19.

psychostasiai are male, since their gender is modelled on the gender of the individuals whose fate they personify, Ker on the 'chest' as well as in the epics is female like the genus of the noun *ker*. Accordingly, she cannot be the personal fate of Polynices fighting in front of her; that is, she cannot be his fate in the sense of some part of himself, but is an independent figure. What is more, according to Pausanias she had teeth like an animal and talons, two characteristics of Ker we meet again in the description of the shield of Heracles.⁵⁴ On these grounds, Stuart-Jones has concluded that the image on the 'chest' has been taken from the *Aspis*.⁵⁵ Given the vast amount of poetry lost to us it seems hard to prove this. However, her close relation to poetry in general is suggested by the fact that Ker was not represented again in any other image. In addition to the singularity of Ker in Greek art, the difference in Ker's iconography in Homer and Hesiod also supports the view that the daemon on the 'chest' is not a stock figure from folk tale either.

Nyx, Hypnos and Thanatos

πεποίηται δὲ γυνὴ παῖδα λευκὸν καθεύδοντα ἀνέχουσα τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ, τῇ δὲ ἐτέρᾳ μέλανα ἔχει παῖδα καθεύδοντι ἑοικότα, ἀμφοτέρους διεστραμμένους τοὺς πόδας. δηλοῖ μὲν δὴ τὰ ἐπιγράμματα, συνεῖναι δὲ καὶ ἄνευ τῶν ἐπιγραμμάτων ἔστι, Θάνατόν τε εἶναι σφᾶς καὶ Ὑπνον, καὶ ἀμφοτέροις Νύκτα αὐτοῖς τροφόν. Paus. 5.18.1

A woman is represented supporting a sleeping white child on her right arm, and on her left a black child like one that sleeps; both have their feet turned outwards. The inscriptions show – though it is easy to comprehend the scene without them – that they are Death and Sleep, and that she who nurses them is Night.

According to Pausanias, Nyx is carrying in her arms white Hypnos and black Thanatos, one sleeping and the other only appearing to sleep. The iconography of a *kourotrophos* with two children is not entirely uncommon;⁵⁶ however, the constellation of figures as well as Hypnos' and Thanatos' depiction as children is unique. Thus it seems remarkable that, in Hesiod, Night is not only the mother of Sleep and Death⁵⁷ but that the well-known passage in *Theogony* 756–7 also indicates a similar iconographic

⁵⁴ Hes. *Scut.* 156–60; 248–57. In Hom. *Il.* 18. 535–40 there are no such animal features; Ker in the battle scene on the shield of Achilles is described like a human being, wearing, however, a bloodstained dress adopted by Ps.-Hesiod later on as well.

⁵⁵ Stuart-Jones 1894: 51. On the interpretation of the scene cf. Borg 2002: 109–11.

⁵⁶ For parallels see Borg 2002: 132–3 with further evidence; Splitter 2000: 31.

⁵⁷ Hes. *Theog.* 211–12; 756–9. In Homer, the genealogy is not entirely clear but Sleep and Death are brothers and twins respectively: Hom. *Il.* 14.231 (κασιγνήτω Θανάτοιο); 16.672 (Ὑπνω καὶ Θανάτῳ διδυμάσσι).

constellation in spite of the fact that only one brother is actually carried on Night's arms:

ἢ δ' Ὑπνον μετὰ χερσὶ, κασίγνητον Θανάτοιο,
Νύξ ὀλοή, νεφέλη κεκαλυμμένη ἥεροειδεῖ.

But the other holds in her arms Sleep the brother of Death, even evil Night, wrapped in a vaporous cloud.

Accordingly, we may feel inclined to follow Stuart-Jones here in assuming a direct relationship between the image on the 'chest' and the *Theogony*.⁵⁸

Poetic modes of expression

On a different occasion, I have already tried to demonstrate that the 'chest' is unique among archaic works of art in another respect, that is in using allegories and allegorical personifications.⁵⁹ Both are modes of expression based on the visualisation of their subject but, quite surprisingly, first appear in poetry. In real images we find only a few examples from the end of the sixth century onwards with numbers increasing slightly by the end of the fifth century. The 'chest' does not copy and illustrate individual, specific allegories taken from poetry but uses a poetic means of expression demonstrating ways of thinking and of conveying a message similar to that of poetry. These means are fundamentally different from those of real images in art of the time. In this context we may recall that the epigrams also provide a link to poetry by using a mode of expression, a poetic form, rather than by direct quotation. Even the Atlas epigram, probably involving an intertextual allusion, is not a direct quotation. This close link between a piece of art and poetry is unique within the archaic period, and I hope to show on another occasion that the composition of the 'chest' as a whole may be a direct reaction to the contest of the arts started already by Homer when he used the ecphrasis of Achilles' shield, created by Hephaestus, to refer to his own divine *techné*.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Stuart-Jones 1894: 51–2. Stuart-Jones goes even further claiming that all children of Night listed in *Theog.* 211ff. would figure on the 'chest' suggesting an even closer relationship between the two works. However, the identification of the two women pounding in a mortar in Il3 is more than uncertain (cf. Splitter 2000: 32; Borg 2002: 122–6); Geras is definitely missing; Eris appears in a Homeric scene.

⁵⁹ Borg 2002.

⁶⁰ Snodgrass 1998: 109 seems to have seen the parallel as well but claims that 'Pausanias has made it [i.e. the 'chest'] into a kind of poor man's Shield of Achilles'. However, Pausanias' dry description can hardly be more different from Homer's, and it is the designer of the *kypsele* who tried to rival the great poets.

For now, there remains the question of how such an unusual piece of art could have come into being in the first place. Who would be capable of designing such a work? As Luca Giuliani and Anthony Snodgrass have demonstrated, there is no indication that vase painters of that time intended to illustrate texts (as opposed to common stories) at all and the general differences between mythical images on vases and their counterparts in poetry, often noticed with surprise, are due to the basically oral nature of the poems.⁶¹ Vase painters did not possess and had no access to written versions of works of poetry, which they could have used to make faithful illustrations of them – assuming for the sake of the argument that they would at least occasionally have wished to do so. Rather, they had to rely on their memory, which would have been not just selective but also ‘contaminated’ by other versions of the ‘same’ narratives and episodes. Yet the uniquely close relationship between the design of the ‘chest’ and poetry – including their formal, rhetorical aspects, their visualising strategies – can hardly be explained without the assumption that this design was based on a good knowledge of poetry and poetic strategies, possibly even on written versions of at least some pieces of poetry.⁶²

If this is right, then the ancient tradition that the ‘chest’ was donated by the Cypselids, the tyrants of Corinth, becomes even more relevant. A great deal of poetry was commissioned by aristocratic families including tyrants and also performed or read at their gatherings and festivals. If indeed written texts were involved, all the evidence would support the suggestion that the first written epics (or parts of them) were in the possession of the great archaic tyrants’ families. Although there is no explicit evidence for the Cypselids’ possession of written poetry – as opposed to Pisistratus’ and Polycrates’⁶³ – there is no reason to doubt that conditions in Corinth could have been quite similar to those in Athens and Samos.⁶⁴ While we can only speculate about any details concerning the planning, design and

⁶¹ Giuliani 1998: esp. 107–26, Snodgrass 2001, both with further bibliography; on the question of early written epic also Rösler 1980: 45–56 with bibliography, esp. Dihle 1970: 94–119; 144–53.

⁶² Snodgrass 1998: 115 and 2001 rightly stresses that the ‘chest’ has only very few images of Homeric themes, and that it is rather revealing that Pausanias, like many modern scholars, displays a bias towards Homer when attempting to interpret the scenes in the upper *chora*.

⁶³ Athen. 1.3 A: cf. Rösler 1980: esp. 48–9 with n. 50.

⁶⁴ The fact that the Cypselids are indeed slightly earlier still does not necessarily pose a problem; cf. Dihle 1970: 108–19, who argues for a step-by-step distribution of written versions of Homeric epic, possibly even of just parts of it, from the seventh century onwards, and proposes that Hesiod’s poems were written poetry from the start (ibid. 120–34); on the gradual spread of writing and the use of writing in poetic production see Thomas 1992: esp. 101–27 with valid methodological critique of schematic attempts to establish whether or not a particular text was originally created as oral or written poetry.

creation of the 'chest', the tyrant's family must have been involved in some way since it must have been through their encouragement and mediation that specific contents and rhetorical strategies of written poetry were made known to the person who designed the 'chest'. Against this background, it also becomes more comprehensible that the 'chest' is such an isolated piece. Pausanias' attempt to attribute the epigrams to the Corinthian poet Eumelus fails not least on chronological grounds,⁶⁵ and we would also hesitate to believe that an anonymous poet of some repute has composed the rather unsophisticated epigrams on the 'chest'. Accordingly, the most plausible scenario probably is that a member of the Cypselid 'court' was responsible for the overall design as well as the epigrams, a person with very detailed knowledge of poetry in general and possibly even access to some written poetry, who felt challenged to enter into the competition between the different media. As the superior *techne* of Hephaestus creating the shield is an implicit reference to Homer's *techne*, the hexameters on the 'chest' may be taken as a reference to the ambitious claims of its anonymous creator.

⁶⁵ Pavese 1987: 53–7. *DNP* 4 (1998) 249–50 s.v. Eumelos (J. Latacz); West 2002. For a different view see Snodgrass 2001: 134.