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VISIONS OF TRAGEDY

TRAGIC STRUCTURING IN ATTIC BLACK-FIGURE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE STORY OF TROILOS

E A Mackay (University of Natal, Durban)

The quest for the origins of tragedy has a long history, and its emphasis has tended to be on form rather than concept, with good reason since for the ancient writers the stem τραγ- conveyed a primary denotation of dramatic performance. Yet Aristotle in the *Poetics* is far more concerned with the concept than the form. In discussing the nature of tragedy, he is at pains to describe the best kind of tragic figure and the best kind of plot-structure in general terms.

As Aristotle suggests in the *Poetics* (1450b–1452a) in discussing the structuring of plot in terms of causation, the shaping of a story to fit such a pattern, whether in a dramatic presentation or other form of narration, ideally requires the initial imposition of an overall interpretation on the part of the narrator, and a consequent critical selection of events and supporting images that will eliminate all that is not directly relevant to that interpretation. The dramatic form is undoubtedly best suited to the realising of this ideal, as the linear, real-time presentation allows the ruthless elimination of all but the essential to be perceived as creative clarity rather than impoverishment of invention. The richer texture of the epic weave calls for a less austere treatment, and so it is not surprising that one finds in the Homeric texts only proto-tragic elements rather than the full tragic treatment of a story. Early lyric poetry is also generically ill-disposed to the narration of tragically-structured tales, although again one can find tragic elements.

There is, however, another narrative medium in archaic Greece which draws upon the same repertoire of traditional, mythological stories: that is the visual representation and evocation in art, most particularly in the Attic black-figure narrative tradition of the sixth century B.C. Of course, the function of the pictures is not primarily to evoke a tragic response but to represent recognisable mythological narratives, stories which for the most part affirm the traditional values of Greek society. Nevertheless, some of the mythological scenes seem consistently to have been given a tragic interpretation by the different artists who painted them, or to express it another way, some scene-types transcend the limitations of their medium.

Aristotle's analysis of what constitutes the essence of a tragic structure involves a middling kind of person, inclined rather to good than to bad, who comes to grief as a result of a serious *hamartia* or mistake. Our appreciation of the nobility of his fate is better when there is a *peripeteia* or reversal of intent, and an *anagnorisis* or recognition, preferably in combination with the *peripeteia*. For the tragic viewpoint, whatever the narrative medium, it is not sufficient to consider only the 'events' of the story—the central character's stated intent at the outset and his actual achievement at the end; the *hamartia* resides in the (ideally) noble but wrong reasons for pursuing the stated intent, and the *peripeteia* in the causal interconnections between his setting out to pursue the stated intent and his contrasting final

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achievement. The more clearly these reasons and causes can be set out, the more perceptible will be the contrast between heroic intent and actual failure, and if the perceivers can to a greater or lesser extent identify with the 'tragic figure', vicariously experiencing and at the same time assessing his emotional responses (for instance, by fearing and pitying) as the reasons for his making his mistaken choices, their awareness of the essential ambivalence of noble failure will be all the more acute. Thus the tragic viewpoint and the potential for perceiving 'tragedy' requires the presentation of a process rather than of an isolated fact or event, and so it is most readily presented through what may be termed a durative medium such as literature, whether oral or literary, where reasons can be stated and the causal structuring of events can be clearly demonstrated.

The visual medium of narrative art is severely restricted as a means of conveying tragedy,[1] since being normally limited to a single event, it cannot readily convey causal interconnections between a series of events, and being normally non-verbal, it cannot readily convey intent nor contrast this with achievement. Thus in the normal concept of pictorial 'narrative' (which is of course not truly narrative but rather the evocation of narrative) there can be no representation of *hamartia*, of *peripeteia* or of *anagnorisis*. As will be shown, however, in the tradition of Athenian vase-painting of the sixth century B.C. the more reflective artists found ways of conveying these abstract concepts, and so of presenting a tragic interpretation of the event depicted: depictions of the story of Achilleus and Troilos will provide good examples of the vase-painting potential for visual rendition of tragic structuring.[2] At the outset it must be recognised that for both ancient and modern viewers any interpretation of a traditional vase-painting narrative is dependent upon a prior knowledge of the myth; in this it is like dramatic tragedy: both genres are drawing upon the repertoire of traditional tales that every Greek viewer or member of the ancient audience knew well from childhood. In both genres alike, the interest is in the interpretation laid upon the myth, that is, in the structuring of the story.

The story of the death of Troilos at the hands of Achilleus was popular among the Attic black-figure vase-painters from about 570 B.C. Whatever the details and interpretation may be, it is a tale of savagery towards a human being and disrespect for a god. Troilos, the young son of Hekabe and Priam (or alternatively of Apollo, according to Apollodoros *Bibl.* 3.12.5), a young prince of Troy, was accustomed to water his horses at a certain spring not far outside the walls of Troy.[3] For whatever reason, Achilleus lay in wait behind the fountain one day. Troilos came

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1 At least insofar as a single picture or scene is concerned; a series of pictures (such as a comic-strip) of course can constitute a durative medium.

2 The following abbreviations will be used: *LIMC* = *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*; *ABV* = *Attic Black-figure Vase-painters* (Beazley 1956); *Add*[2] = *Beazley Addenda*, 2d ed. (Carpenter 1989); *Para* = *Paralipomena* (Beazley 1971).

3 Homer refers to Troilos as Τρωΐλον ἱππιοχάρμην ("Troilos delighting in horses", *Iliad* 24.257): his equine interests were probably part of his traditional, mythic persona.

unsuspecting with his horses; Achilleus emerged from his hiding place; Troilos fled, whereupon Achilleus in a fury pursued him. He caught him in the nearby sanctuary of Apollo Thymbraios, where the youth had sought refuge at the altar of the god, and ruthlessly slew him there, heedless of the sacrosanctity of the spot. Apollo, who had been particularly fond of Troilos (whether or not he had sired him) was incensed at the outrage; consequently he it was who eventually caused the death of Achilleus.[4] A story for which the literary sources provide no clear evidence of direct connection with that of Troilos, but which is regularly related to it by the vase-painters in their Troilos scenes, is that of Polyxena and Achilleus. Achilleus had caught sight of the beautiful daughter of Priam (Troilos' older sister) during the ten long years of war and had lusted after her, although she was beyond his reach in the enemy city. Before he died, he gave orders that when Troy was taken, Polyxena was to be sacrificed at his tomb, as indeed she was.

Since all narrative vase-paintings depend on the viewer's knowledge of the story as it was known to the painter, modern scholars encounter an interpretative problem, for we do not have a comprehensive early source for the Troilos and Polyxena episodes. Proclus in his *Chrestomathia* states that Achilleus' slaughter of Troilos was narrated in the *Kypria* (Allen 1969:105), which implies that it occurred early on in the Trojan War. Polyxena is mentioned in these summaries only in connection with her being sacrificed on the tomb of Achilleus, a late event in the course of the war narrated in the *Ilioupersis* (Allen 1969:108); however the scholiast on Euripides *Hekabe* 41 seems to imply that Polyxena's fate was mentioned by the poet of the *Kypria* (Allen 1969:125), which at least would bring the brother and sister together in the same epic. One wonders what might have been the occasion for the *Kypria* poet's singing of an event that lay far in the future of the development of the war, compared with his subject matter. An hypothesis suggested by the vase-paintings would be that the poet, including Polyxena in the *dramatis personae* of his narration of Achilleus' ambush, pursuit and slaughter of Troilos, made mention of her eventual sacrifice on Achilleus' tomb as a further exemplum of Achilleus' cruel and unnatural ways.[5] Was the ambush of Troilos perhaps represented as the occasion of Achilleus' first seeing Polyxena?

The reasons for Achilleus' slaughter of Troilos are vital for any interpretation. In the absence of an early source, it is necessary to try to piece together the motivation from the available evidence. Essentially there are two divergent versions. In one, Achilleus has seen the handsome young Trojan regularly watering his horses at the spring, and lusts after him; he lies in wait like a dirty old man amid the bushes of a children's playground, emerges when Troilos approaches, and makes advances to him. Troilos rejects these overtures and flees; Achilleus pursues in a blind fury of frustration and kills him in a rage where the child has taken sanctuary

4 An interpretation that Schefold (1993:138, 144, with reference to Zindel 1974) suggests may date from the time of Solon; see also Schefold 1978:204, 282.

5 Ibykos also may have brought Troilos and Polyxena together in one context: fr. 12 (S 224) (Loeb text p.240–242).

in the precinct of Apollo Thymbraios.[6] The other version involves an oracle predicting that if Troilos lives to his twentieth year, Troy will not be taken: knowing of this, in an urge to help his own side in the war, Achilleus lies in wait for the boy, pursues him and kills him, again where he has taken sanctuary in the precinct of Apollo Thymbraios. In this second version, although the motive is one of patriotism rather than of selfish lust, the impiety of the butchering in the precinct or on the altar remains.[7]

In the sixth-century vase-painting tradition Athenian black-figure artists developed three different scene-types to depict the Troilos story, each focusing on a separate time-span within it: the ambush, the pursuit, and the killing (which tends to be combined with the fight over the body where Achilleus opposes Hektor, who is supported by other Trojan warriors). Categorised lists of the various examples of these three types and their variants may be found in *LIMC* I, Achilleus 206–388,[8] to which the reader is referred also for further illustrations. Scene-types A and B include a woman, clearly associated with Troilos, who has been consistently identified as Polyxena although by an unfortunate accident of survival no scene preserves an inscribed name.[9]

A *The Ambush* (*LIMC* I Achilleus 206–250, plates 78–81): Figure 1.[10]

The details and arrangement of this scene-type remain fairly constant from the earliest examples[11] through to the end of the sixth century and beyond.[12] Central to most scenes is a construction representing the fountain. Achilleus crouches on one side of it, while from the other side Polyxena approaches with her hydria or is already proceeding to fill it. Troilos follows her towards the water, riding one horse and leading another in step. Most of the scenes include a bird, recognisably corvid

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6 Although the literary evidence for this version is mostly late, reliefs on shieldbands from Olympia (Olympia B 987, B 1803, B 1912) dated around 590–580 B.C. seem to indicate that the erotic motivation was known early: they represent Achilleus slaying Troilos on the altar, on which stands a cock, the conventional love-gift from *erastes* to *eromenos* (*LIMC* I Achilleus 377 fig. on p.90, and see comment on p.73).

7 These two versions are a patchwork of shreds of mostly later literary evidence. A list of the sources may be found in *LIMC* I p.73–74; see also Frazer's n.3 to Apollodoros *Epit.* 3.32, p.201–203.

8 See also Schefold 1978:203ff, 1993:303ff; and Zindel 1974:107ff.

9 Most of these scenes do not bear inscriptions, and the François Vase (n.13 below), with its wealth of inscribed information, is unfortunately missing the fragment which would show the upper part of the woman's body and her name.

10 Figure 1 represents a fairly early example of this scene-type, on a hydria of about 560 B.C. attributed to the Painter of London B 76: New York 45.11.2 (*ABV* 85.2, 683; *Para* 524; *Add*[2] 23). Drawing after *LIMC* I Achilleus 234, pl.79.

11 On several Tyrrhenian amphorae: for instance Munich 1436 (*ABV* 95.4; *Para* 36; *Add*[2] 25; *LIMC* I Achilleus 230, pl.79).

12 For instance on a lekythos attributed to the Leagros Group, c. 510 B.C.: Copenhagen 3629 (*ABV* 379.272; *Add*[2] 100; *LIMC* I Achilleus 224 pl.78).

in species, which usually sits prominently on the fountain structure: Apollo's raven. Optionally Athene and Hermes may stand behind Achilleus as though supporting him.

B *The Pursuit* (*LIMC* I Achilleus 282–330, plates 85–89): Figure 3.[13]

Two features are canonical for pursuit scenes: Achilleus striding after Troilos who gallops away with his two horses; Polyxena fleeing ahead of him, having dropped her hydria in fright (the horses must leap over it). The fountain may be represented at one end of the scene, and there may be one or two other figures included.

C *The Killing* (*LIMC* I Achilleus 359–366, plates 93–94): Figure 2.[14]

This is not such a popular part of the story among the painters. In this scene-type the altar of Apollo is regularly featured in the middle of the scene. Achilleus may hold Troilos' body, or have in his hand the severed head with the body slumped at his feet. Trojan warriors usually approach from the right, sometimes named: Hektor and Aineias recur. Often Achilleus is throwing the youth's head at his assailants. Sometimes Athene and Hermes stand behind him.

In each of the three scene-types there is regularly included an object or entity that does not need to be there, positioned with sufficient prominence to attract the viewer's attention. In the ambush, this is the raven, and indeed, perhaps also Polyxena; in the pursuit, it is the fallen hydria, and again, by implication, Polyxena; in the slaughter, the severed head of Troilos. As will be shown, such details are the key to identifying a tragic structure in the story as represented.

Before discussing this phenomenon in the vase-paintings, however, brief consideration must be given to the occurrence of a narrative technique in the Homeric epics that is precisely similar,[15] whereby at moments of great emotional intensity certain objects (or, as is possible within the context of the linear narrative, actions) are described which have an "emblematic quality" or "carry an effective charge of symbolic significance" (Griffin 1990:24). Such is the sceptre of Achilleus in *Iliad* 1.233–246, described in detail as to its history and then dashed to the ground to emphasise the great oath which marks Achilleus' withdrawal from the fighting; such too the wedding headdress of Andromache in *Iliad* 22.467–472, which (again, described in detail) she throws off at the realisation that Hektor is dead. In other

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13 This scene-type is illustrated in the middle section of Figure 3 which represents a band from the obverse of the François Vase: a volute krater from about 570 B.C. signed by Kleitias and Ergotimos, Florence 4209 (*ABV* 76.1, 682; *Para* 29; *Add*^{2} 21). Drawing after Schefold 1966: pl.48.

14 Figure 2 represents the scene on the obverse of a Tyrrhenian amphora of about 570 B.C. attributed to the Timiades Painter: Munich 1426 (*ABV* 95.5; *Para* 36; *Add*^{2} 25). Drawing after *LIMC* I Achilleus 364 pl.94. On the position of the head see n.24 below.

15 For a full discussion of this, see Griffin 1990:1-49.

respects the vase-painters can be shown to have used narrative techniques that are characteristic of an oral tradition—indicative of a narrative attitude that is peculiar to neither the oral nor the painting traditions;[16] here too in regard to significant objects, as Griffin points out, the phenomenon is indicative of the way the poet (and, I would suggest, the painter) sees the world:

> Symbolic and significant objects and gestures are a development of those which were originally conceived as magical and charged with supernatural power. Sometimes it is not possible to distinguish the two at all clearly. (1990:24)

The François Vase (c. 570 B.C.),[17] which in form offers more narrative scope (given the greater length of its story-bands compared with the panel of an amphora or hydria), presents a version of the Troilos story that seems to encompass all three scene-types, and that may thus, with its fuller treatment and named figures, help to explain elements in them all. The three stages of the story seem to unfold in time across the frieze from left to right. At the left of the scene is a formally constructed fountain house, behind which (that is, to the left) stands Apollo, gesturing towards the scene taking place before him. A youth, Troon, fills a hydria at one of the waterspouts, as though enacting Troilos' own earlier actions; a second hydria stands under the other spout, doubtless that of Rodia who stands to the right of the structure gesturing emotionally with both hands; she is perhaps a companion of Polyxena; here again, in parallel with Troon and Troilos, one may perceive an *altera persona* of Polyxena, similarly demonstrating her erstwhile action. To the right of Rodia stand further figures, supporting Achilleus: Thetis, Hermes and Athene. In the centre of the frieze are the standard pursuit elements: Achilleus strides after Troilos, whose horses leap over the fallen vessel, while Polyxena flees further ahead. At the right end of the scene Antenor gestures towards the safety of the walls of Troy before which Priam is seated, calling for help which Hektor and Polites, emerging from a gateway in full armour, are too late to offer; they will fight for possession of the corpse.

In the standard ambush scenes, the virtual omnipresence of the large birds is remarkable. Unlike the many smaller and often indeterminate birds that fly across black-figure scenes (especially those where someone is likely to die or is already dead), these birds are very clearly identified as corvids, with a thick, short neck and heavy beak;[18] their extreme size renders them something of a focal point in the scene, making it obvious that they play a significatory role. In a Mediterranean environment a corvid immediately suggests the raven, which for the ancient Greek was the prophetic bird of Apollo, and the bird has customarily been identified as

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16 See Mackay 1995, 1996.

17 Refer to n.13 above, and see Figure 3, where the entire scene is represented, divided into three sections so as to fit the page format.

18 My thanks to Steven Piper for bringing his ornithological expertise to bear in confirming the identification of these birds.

such in these scenes. Given the mythological context, there are adequate grounds for reading the raven as a metaphor for Apollo (much as the Athenian owl is identified with Athene and sometimes stands for her on vases[19]), particularly taking into consideration the Troilos band from the François Vase described above, where at the left end, which is evocative of the ambush, Apollo stands as though commanding the scene, and there is no raven.

In all the examples I have seen, the raven faces towards the Trojans, as though warning them of the lurking menace. If one considers that Apollo was traditionally the staunch supporter of the Trojan side, and that it was ultimately Apollo who would be responsible for Achilleus' death, the raven is indeed unlikely to be supporting Achilleus in these scenes. As the god's prophetic bird, on the one hand it could recall the prophecy about Troilos, reminding us that the youth's imminent demise will presage the eventual fall of Troy; on the other, it signifies the god's presence, observing the series of events in which Achilleus will on two counts anger Apollo: pursuing the Trojan prince (perhaps the god's own son), and slaughtering him in the god's sacred precinct, the Thymbraion. There emerges a cause-and-effect connection between the murder of Troilos and the eventual fall of Troy, and between the murder of Troilos and the eventual death of Achilleus; this is contained within the figure of the raven, which therefore assumes considerable importance for decoding the deeper significance of a scene that presages equally the doom of Achilleus and of Troy.

While both these events (the fall of Troy and the death of Achilleus) could be presented as potentially tragic, it is difficult to perceive them both at the same time from such a viewpoint. It seems more likely that the death of Achilleus was the development portended by the vase-painters, a supposition that is supported by the otherwise inexplicable[20] inclusion of Polyxena in the scenes, usually in a central and hence prominent position. The only other mythological story in which Polyxena features is her own death, when as soon as Troy had fallen, following the instructions of Achilleus himself before he died, the Greeks sacrificed the girl at his tomb. The appearance of Polyxena in a scene with Achilleus, then, seems calculated to make the viewer think of his future death as well as hers; of possible additional relevance is the consideration that perhaps this ambush was thought of as the occasion when Achilleus first saw the girl and desired her, becoming obsessed to the extent that he determined to possess her in death as never in life.

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19 As Deirdre Harrison shows (diss. Durban, 1996), an owl is sometimes represented in scene-types which otherwise include the figure of Athene. See also Lissarague 1989:43–44.

20 Of course, if early literary sources had already juxtaposed the two stories, the inclusion on the vases is not inexplicable; but the suggested motivation that follows would still be viable as it would then be the motivation offered by the poets, followed by the painters.

The scenes that depict Achilleus' pursuit of Troilos generally do not include the raven.[21] In its place, so to speak, as a significant object, is the hydria let fall by Polyxena in her flight: in many of the scenes it is represented as broken. The vessel is usually positioned prominently near the middle of the scene in the space under the belly and forelegs of Troilos' galloping horses, where its striking shape attracts attention (especially when broken), as can be seen in the Troilos band on the François Vase which is probably the first extant depiction to include the hydria in this position.[22] The dropped hydria is in itself an image signifying the fear felt by the pursued siblings, attesting to the perceived need for unencumbered speed of escape. However, while its position draws the eye to the leaping horses of Troilos, reflective consideration focuses our attention on Polyxena who was carrying it; thus her presence in the pursuit scene-type (where she is normally represented near or at the right margin of the picture frame) is rendered as prominent as in the ambush type, where she tended to be positioned in the middle of the scene. The significance of her inclusion in both scene-types seems to be the same: a reminder that Achilleus will die, encoded for those familiar with the myths with the additional reminder that the event depicted will in fact contribute to his death.

In most of the smaller group of scenes that depict Achilleus' killing of Troilos and the fight for the corpse, the most visually striking object (after the altar itself, which can however be regarded as a necessary element in the scene) is the severed head of Troilos, either held aloft by Achilleus as he vaunts over the body beside the altar,[23] or hurled in defiance at the advancing Trojan warriors.[24] It is not necessary to the meaning of the scene that the corpse be beheaded, merely that it be dead; the mutilation and subsequent handling of the head seem designed to emphasise the monstrous aspect of Achilleus as a perpetrator of atrocities. Achilleus has first violated the god's holy sanctuary with murderous bloodshed—and here the altar, usually made prominent with pattern and/or colour, plays a vital significatory role—

21 Two exceptions occur among works attributed to the C Painter: the Siana-cups New York 01.8.6 (*ABV* 51.4, 681; *Para* 523; *Add*[2] 13; *LIMC* I Achilleus 307, pl.88) and Louvre CA 6113 (*LIMC* I Achilleus 310 pl.89) near the beginning of the tradition of representing this story, at a time when the first two stages of the story (ambush and pursuit) had not yet developed their own distinctive visual narrative elements. Both the cup scenes also include a hare running beneath the legs of Troilos' horses: a symbol of speed, perhaps, or a spurned and escaping lovegift: see Schefold 1978:206.

22 It is probably significant that the other two renditions of the story from about the same date, on the two Siana-cups attributed to the C Painter (n.21 above) both feature the hare in the same position, and include as well a flying bird (the raven from the ambush type-scene?); the New York cup also includes the hydria as well, but under the striding legs of Achilleus: clearly the years around 570 were the time when the traditional format of this scene-type was being established.

23 As for instance on a Tyrrhenian amphora attributed to the Prometheus Painter, Florence 70993 (*ABV* 95.6, 683; *Para* 36; *Add*[2] 25; *LIMC* I Achilleus 360, pl.93).

24 As most horrifyingly on the Tyrrhenian amphora illustrated in Figure 2, where the head is in mid-air over the altar between Achilleus and Hektor, seemingly caught on the two opposed spearpoints.

and then has further vented his fury on the helpless body. Through the inclusion of the altar and the disembodied head, a compelling image of impiety and inhumanity is constructed that provides convincing motivation for the hero's death at the hands of the vengeful god (although not as directly as by the inclusion of the raven and Polyxena in the other two scene-types).

It can be seen, then, that in the vase-painting tradition the causal interrelationship between a series of events can be indicated by the inclusion of one or more significant objects in a visual evocation of the story that focuses on a given event from the series.[25] Such an emphasis on cause and effect is sufficient to suggest a tragic structure for the story, and this can be demonstrated by applying the Aristotelian terminology of tragedy to the Troilos story: the tragedy is, of course, that of Achilleus, a hero unequivocally inclined rather to good than to bad according to ancient values.

The *hamartia* of Achilleus lies in every aspect of his treatment of Troilos: the ambush, the pursuit and the killing. In the ambush, he undertakes a course of action that will lead to his downfall, however his motivation is to be interpreted. If lust was regarded by the Greeks of the sixth century as the initial motivation, the ensuing, vengeful chase and slaughter of a god's favourite constitutes an appalling misuse of the hero's abilities for selfish (and unfulfilled) ends; if Achilleus in killing Troilos was motivated by a desire to disable the prophecy about Troy's survival, his mistake lay in the manner and place in which he carried out the act. In either case, he incurred the anger of Apollo. The *peripeteia* lies either in Achilleus' intending to satisfy his lust for Troilos and ending up killing the boy in a manner that will ultimately bring about his own death, or alternatively in his intending to prevent the fulfilment of the prophecy connecting the survival of Troilos with that of Troy and ending up angering the god of prophecy by the manner of his accomplishing it. There is also a secondary *peripeteia* involving Polyxena: he lusted after her but won her only in death—his and hers. This is, in a way, parallel to Troilos, and the inclusion of Polyxena would in fact seem to point to lust as the intended reason for the pursuit rather than preempting fulfilment of the prophecy. The *anagnorisis*

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25 Representations of the story of Troilos are of course not unique in being susceptible to this kind of interpretation: there are many others which the vase-painters structured in a similar fashion using similar techniques. The Ilioupersis scenes which combine events provide a complex example of this, as for instance the amphora attributed to Lydos, Berlin 1685 (*ABV* 109.24, 685; *Add*^{2} 30) which on the obverse includes Menelaos and Helen, Neoptolemos swinging the body of Astyanax as he heads for Priam cowering on the altar, and some women pleading for mercy (*LIMC* II Astyanax I,9 pl.682). Interestingly, in the light of the cause and effect relationship discussed above, on the reverse is a pursuit of Troilos (*LIMC* I Achilleus 290 pl.86). For a detailed discussion of the potential significatory role of a specific significant object in vase-painting, see Stewart's (1983) interpretation of the meaning of the François Vase, where he suggests that the 'golden amphora' carried by Dionysos in the middle of the obverse scene of the Wedding of Peleus and Thetis is the key to unravelling the meaning of the vase, that is of each scene and of the interrelatedness of the scenes; for a different reading of the image see Haslam 1991.

would not have satisfied Aristotle's preferences (*Poetics* 1452a–b), for Achilleus does not combine *anagnorisis* with *peripeteia*; rather it seems to be Apollo, if anyone, who recognises the imbalance and eventually rectifies it. Of course, there are other, less satisfying recognitions: that of Hektor and his Trojan supporters, for instance, recognising the dead body of Troilos (which may indeed be why the killing scene is usually combined with the beginning of the fight over the body), or that of Troilos and Polyxena recognising and fleeing from the threat constituted by the lurking Achilleus.

What emerges very clearly is the contrast between the 'normal' character of Achilleus, in most contexts represented as noble and admirable, and the facets represented in these scenes and in this myth. It is a contrast that makes consideration of Achilleus' eventual downfall not only more shocking, but also more of an object lesson in morality. In his encounter with Troilos, Achilleus uses the very qualities that go to constitute his mythic persona—his speed in the chase and his ability to slay an enemy—to bring about his own eventual ruin through his neglect of the respect appropriate to a vengeful god. In the vase scenes, the apparently incidental details of Apollo's raven, Polyxena with her fallen hydria, and the mutilated corpse of Troilos serve to highlight these specific points, with or without a possible direct influence from an earlier or contemporary literary source. The raven evokes the prophetic presence of the god; Polyxena emphasises through parallel example the vengeful disregard for young life exhibited by Achilleus; and the motif of Troilos' head in the slaughter and fight scene-type underscores Achilleus' brutality in a particularly repulsive manner. These three images are integral to the interpretation of the narrative adopted and represented by the painters, essential ingredients for the decoding of the tragic cast of the tale.

It can be seen, then, that while the roots of the dramatic form of Greek tragedy undoubtedly lie somewhere in the sixth century range of performance-poetry attested to in later documentation, the tragic concept, as expressed in the selective structuring of a story, may be recognised as an established part of the traditional narrative technique of Attic black-figure vase-painting.

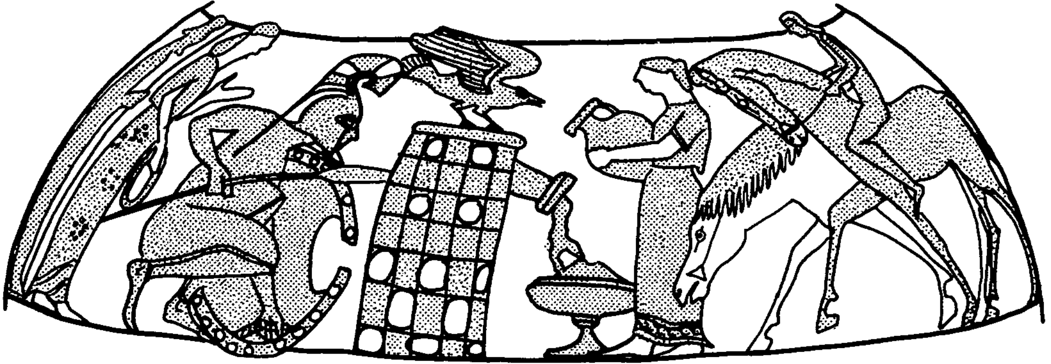

Figure 1: Scene from a hydria attributed to the Painter of London B 76 (New York Metropolitan Museum of Art 45.11.2).

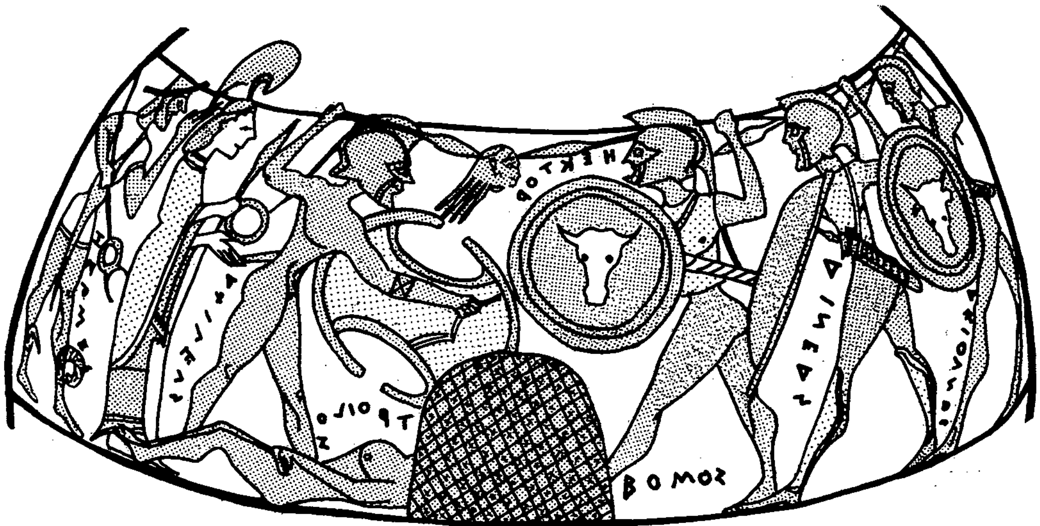

Figure 2: Scene from a Tyrrhenian amphora attributed to the Timiades Painter (Munich Antikensammlungen 1426).

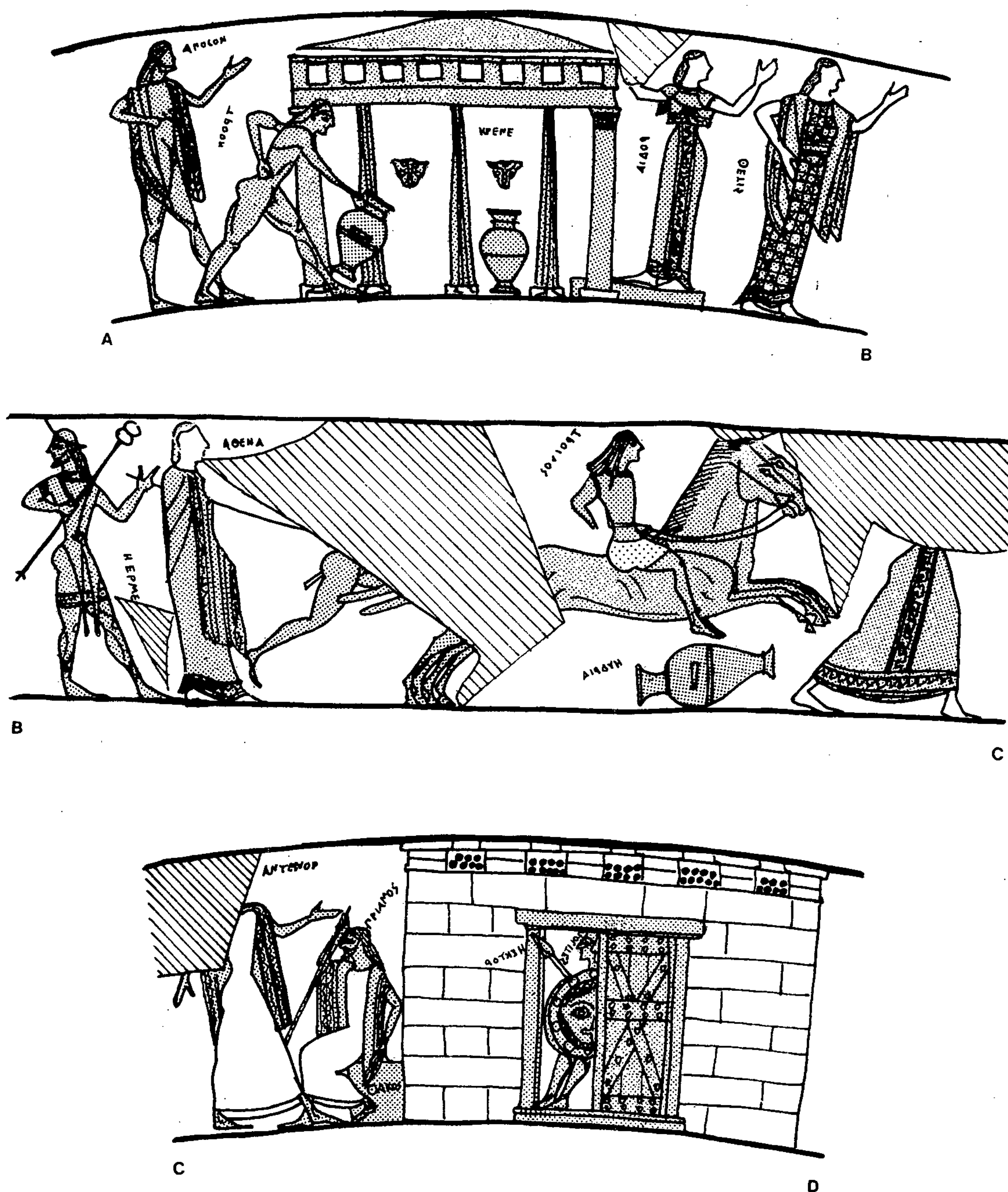

Figure 3: Scene from a volute krater (the François Vase) signed by Kleitias and Ergotimos (Florence Museo Archeologico 4209).

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