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Nikolina Kéi

## Beneath the handles of Attic vases\*

Anyone who has visited a museum filled of Greek pots will know how difficult it is closely to examine and appreciate a vase – especially the reverse side and the area beneath the handles. Dozens of pots, closely packed together in a rather limited space, are exhibited so as almost exclusively to show a ‘main’ scene. Although it is commonplace nowadays to assert that vases were originally seen from multiple angles, many museums continue to display them as if they were not three-dimensional objects but rather more like two-dimensional paintings.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon is of course due to the lack of space in modern galleries. But it also reflects an academic tradition that goes back to the Neoclassical context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, according to which the area beneath the handles is thought to have been reserved for secondary and meaningless ornaments – to serve as a frame for the central pictorial field (occupied by figures in action). In other words, there is assumed to be a neat dichotomy between what we usually call the ‘ornamental’ and ‘figurative’ registers of the pot – between ‘decoration’ and ‘image’, no less than between ‘frame’ and ‘scene’. Needless to say, the underlying idea behind this polarity between ‘ornament and figure’ is the painted canvas – the hanging picture that is presented within a decorative frame in our modern picture galleries.<sup>2</sup>

Because Greek panel-pictures do not survive in the archaeological record, Attic vases had to compensate for this regretful loss of ancient painting: considered as the reflection of ancient *pinakes*, painted pots have had their surface divided into two enclosed and autonomous registers – the main picture field and its frame (including above all the handle area). However, Attic vases are not flat panel-pictures, and the handle area is much more than an ornamental framing register. This claim can be demonstrated at the outset by considering two main facts. First, in many cases, abstract, stylised and disproportionate florals from the ‘ornamental’ framing register

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1 The same is true for numerous book publications and online vase-collections: for many of the vases mentioned in this paper, it was supremely difficult to find a photograph of the handle area. On the historical treatment of Greek vases as ‘two-dimensional’ pictures, see now Marconi 2017, esp. 117–125.

2 On the ideology of the frame in post-Enlightenment contexts, see Platt and Squire 2017, 7–84 (discussing painted pottery at e. g. 12–21), along with Dietrich 2017, esp. 270–274. On the Kantian backdrop to this thinking, and the idea of the *ergon* and *parergon*, see Squire’s introduction to this volume (16–22), along with Neer’s chapter (206–209).

of the vase find their way right into the main scene where they are fully integrated as ornaments, narrative agents and polyvalent signs of aesthetic, sensory and sensuous experience: manipulated by figures, growing out of the ground like ‘real’ plants or just floating in the pictorial field, these floral elements magnify figures while supplying the narration with a host of values linked to the Greek notions of *kosmos*, *poikilia* and *charis*.<sup>3</sup> Second, the opposite is also true: very often, the ‘framing register’, namely the handle area, is occupied by figures, sometimes in close interaction with abstract and stylised ornaments. After all, figures – namely animals and ships – made their first, discreet appearance in the sub-handle zone of Middle Geometric vases (c. 850–760 BC).<sup>4</sup>

It is precisely this second fact that will serve as the starting point in my chapter: in what follows, the aim is to show how figures, objects and floral elements – depicted beneath the handles of Attic vases dated to the sixth and fifth centuries BC – are not mere space-fillers, but elements pregnant with significance. In doing so, I will show that the handle area, despite being marginal within the architecture of the vase,<sup>5</sup> is semantically loaded; likewise, that the modern separation between ‘ornament’ and ‘figure’ – fictitious categories created for chronological and stylistic scholarly purposes – is deeply problematic in the context of Attic vase-painting. In other words, far from being monolithic and stereotypical, the so-called ‘ornamental’ and ‘figurative’ registers of Attic vases interact with one another in numerous ways. Given that the corpus of handle area motifs is enormous, I have had to make a choice based first on their ornamental and semantic interest, and second on their interplay with the main scenes.

So what exactly do we find under a handle? It seems that there are no clear-cut rules – and that the list is limitless. As we shall see, there are animals (especially dogs, felines, goats and dolphins), birds, insects and hybrid creatures. There are also plants (stylised trees, grapevines and palmettes), rocks, caves or mountains, ‘abbreviated’ architectural structures (doors, columns, altars and even city-walls) and prestigious objects (tripods, elaborated stools and chairs, kraters, arms etc.). And, of course, there are humans, heroes, deities and, quite often, satyrs. In order to fit into the limited space beneath the handle, figures are depicted either seated, bent, kneeling, fallen on the ground or miniaturised. The narrowness of the space also explains the presence of so many small-scale young boys. Likewise, the handle area is a liminal space that may suggest a state of transition (hence the frequent presence of winged deities, Dionysus and Hermes), isolation and remoteness. It is also an area

<sup>3</sup> Kéi 2015 and 2016; cf. also Neer’s chapter in this volume, 211.

<sup>4</sup> Coulié 2013, 42–45. Cf. the chapters in this volume by Haug and Neer.

<sup>5</sup> The handle area is a liminal space within a vase’s architecture because it is visually less accessible: when the viewer holds the vase by its handles, what naturally attracts his attention is the main side(s) – and only on second glance the area beneath the handles.

prone to transgressive and obscene behaviour. In many cases, and through a variety of means, the handle area enables a destabilising, surprising effect: vegetal patterns, for example, could be transformed into human faces,<sup>6</sup> and the handle itself could likewise actively participate in the scene by taking the place of a narrative element (such as the branch of a tree).

Despite the high degree of *poikilia* in these handle motifs, some more or less common patterns emerge: 1) the handle motifs invest the main scene(s) with supplementary layers of meaning; 2) they shift the viewer's gaze from one side of the vase to the other; 3) they interact with stylised and abstract 'framing ornaments' in a way that blurs the boundaries between the vase's 'ornamental' and 'figurative' registers; and 4) they draw attention to themselves by means of surprising or transgressive behaviour.

Before demonstrating what I mean here, it is necessary to explain my decision to structure what follows around the morphology of different handles, treating first the space around pots with vertical handles, and second that around pots with horizontal handles. My choice of formal criteria can be justified in two ways. First, the figurative programme is subordinated to the vase's specific shape, itself derived from the vase's practical use. In other words, the arrangement of the picture field as a whole (including figures and ornaments) is more or less defined by the handles' type of attachment to the vase's body. For example, in many examples where the handles are attached in the upper part or in the middle of a pot's body, they 'disturb' the placement of the figures: the painter is then forced either to leave the handle area undecorated or else to integrate it into the scene. In the former case, the handle is perceived as an obstacle, and in the latter as a challenge. My second justification is that each handle form creates different visual effects and thus different meanings. The following examples reveal that the handle area, although particularly delicate and challenging to decorate, supplies the economy of the vase with its visual and semantic variegation. Given that the majority of vases presented in this chapter were used in connection with serving and consuming wine within the context of the symposium, such *poikilia* would surely have been much appreciated by ancient viewers.<sup>7</sup>

## Vertical handles

Usually, the space beneath the vertical handles of an amphora is occupied by the stereotypical lotus-palmette pattern serving as a frame for the two scenes of the vase. Nevertheless, in some cases, the floral frame is adorned with living creatures: on an

<sup>6</sup> One might compare here Platt's discussion of Fig. 9.7b in this volume (262–264).

<sup>7</sup> On the sympotic context, cf. Neer's chapter in this volume (221–224).

amphora in the manner of Exekias (c. 520 BC),<sup>8</sup> two owls are proudly posing between the tendrils, with their heads shown frontally (Fig. 6.1). Even though they do not really interact with the figures represented on either side of the vase (on one side Hermes and two women, on the other Dionysus and satyrs), their presence is not superfluous: they act as an animating figurative device which makes the stylised pattern look more natural, more vegetal, more real. The motif also gives the slight impression that the figures of both scenes move in a natural environment.<sup>9</sup> But there is more. After all, owls are famous for their fascinating gaze: by looking straight at the viewer, they invite him to hold his attention to them and on the lateral side in general, instead of looking at the main parts of the vase where the action takes place.

Similar effects could be produced in even more audacious ways. On an amphora now in London (c. 550 BC),<sup>10</sup> and on a contemporary oinochoe by the potter Nikosthenes,<sup>11</sup> the lotus-palmette has been transformed into a human face by the addition of two eyes. Once again, this is a device that has no direct implication for the understanding of the main scenes of the vase, since there is no direct interaction with the figures. Yet we are dealing here with a figural transgression that animates the vase while creating a surprise effect: the viewer finds himself manipulating an anthropomorphised vessel that ‘stares’ back at him.<sup>12</sup>

Painters sometimes also chose handle motifs with an immediate semantic connection to the main scenes, and in a way that shifts the viewer’s gaze from the ‘periphery’ to the ‘centre’. This is the case when the painter replaces the traditional lotus-palmette pattern with grape vines, as on an amphora by Hattatt’s Painter (c. 520–500 BC).<sup>13</sup> Visually, the entwined trunks of these vines extend the handles’ vertical division in a very ornamental way. Semantically, the grape vines as well as the krater placed close to one of them are related to both scenes of the vase, one representing Dionysus as a banqueter in the company of a woman and satyrs, the other the return of Hephaestus to Olympus.

If the grape vines ‘sprout’ on Attic vases, this happens thanks to Dionysus. Indeed, on a rather exceptional amphora signed by the potter Amasis and attributed

**8** Bochum, Kunstsammlungen der Ruhr-Universität S1089; BAPD 9019204; CVA Bochum, Kunstsammlungen der Ruhr-Universität 1, plates 26.1–3, 27.1–3. On floral ornaments beneath handles, see Jacobsthal 1927. On floral ornaments as ‘landscape’ elements, see Hurwit 1992, 63–72. See also Kéi 2015 and 2016.

**9** This is even more accentuated by the presence of animals in the zone beneath the scenes.

**10** London, British Museum B260; BAPD 7848; Steinhart 1995, Plate 14.4. On the ‘anthropomorphic animation’ of vases, see Martens 1992, 285–359 – along with the chapters by Haug and Neer (esp. 210–211) in this volume.

**11** Paris, Musée du Louvre F 116; BAPD 301232; *ABV* 230.2; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 59; Steinhart 1995, Plate 14.3.

**12** Compare here Squire’s discussion of the ‘Euphorbus Plate’ (Figs. 1.1 and 1.4) in the introduction to this volume.

**13** Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1982.1097; BAPD 7306; Kurtz 1982, 139–168.



**Fig. 6.1:** Amphora in the manner of Exekias, c. 520 BC, Bochum, Kunstsammlungen der Ruhr-Universität S1089.

to the Amasis Painter (c. 520–515 BC), it is the god himself who holds the vegetal frame under each handle – an ivy branch in one hand, and a vine branch in the other.<sup>14</sup> In order to fit within the space, Dionysus is depicted to a smaller scale. He strides to the left but turns his head to look back, and in such a way as to relate to both scenes – one side representing a warrior’s departure, the other Athena in conversation with a bearded man (perhaps Poseidon).<sup>15</sup>

Satyrs, as the acolytes of Dionysus, are particularly fond of the field beneath the handles. As usual, we see them acting in odd and transgressive ways: among other things, they masturbate, ejaculate, vomit and crawl. On an amphora close to

<sup>14</sup> Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 01.8026; BAPD 310453; *ABV* 152.26; *Para* 63; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 44.

<sup>15</sup> As Cornelia Isler-Kerényi puts it, ‘both this ambivalent formula and the position of the figure on the vase emphasize the god’s affinity with passages, transitions’ (Isler-Kerényi 2007, 136). The same might be said of the figure of Hermes, as we will see below (153–154).

the Euphiletos Painter (c. 530–520 BC)<sup>16</sup> the transgression takes the form of a fusion between the ornamental and figurative registers: a diminutive satyr holds on to the handle ornament while a second one hangs from it. Their miniaturised presence annuls the separation that the handle zone imposes between the two sides of the vase, while also giving the impression of a continuum between the two main scenes showing Dionysus in the company of satyrs.

But such transgressive behaviour is not exclusive to satyrs. An amphora attributed to a painter of the Medea Group (c. 520 BC)<sup>17</sup> shows a bearded man and a woman (Dionysus and Ariadne?) feasting in the presence of a cortège figured on the other side. Although the scene extends around the vase, there is a marked contrast between the rather ceremonial main scene and the lateral sides: under one handle, a man squats in order to vomit, under the other, a man is actually vomiting.

Sometimes, instead of filling the gap between the two main scenes with a (more or less transgressive) figure, the field beneath the handles is occupied by vignettes, as on an amphora in Naples (c. 540–520 BC) where we see two miniaturised Heracleian deeds:<sup>18</sup> on one side Heracles fighting the boar, on the other Heracles fighting the Nemean lion. These small appended scenes are autonomous in the sense that they may stand on their own. But this does not mean that there is no link between them and the main sides. On the contrary, they operate as paradigmatic models of bravery, enhancing the heroic character of the amphora's two scenes, portraying Theseus' fight against the Minotaur on one side and a warriors' duel on the other.

The miniaturisation of figures finds its best expression on an amphora by the Affecter (c. 540–530 BC), who chose to place a small figured panel on the lower part of each handle, just above the attachment – a device that is exclusive to this painter (Fig. 6.2).<sup>19</sup> The first panel shows a running youth and Bellerophon riding Pegasus; below are a stool, a bird and a horseman (all also miniaturised). The second panel shows a draped man holding a spear and a horseman, while below we once again find Bellerophon and Pegasus. As on the amphora in Naples, these vignettes infuse the main scenes (portraying a warrior's departure with Hermes and Poseidon on one side, and horsemen and Poseidon on the other) with heroic connotations – as well as a sense of rapid movement. Furthermore, it is interesting that the old man, shown close to one handle, is depicted in smaller scale than the rest of the figures: it is as if the proximity to the handle area had a diminishing effect on him.

**16** Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen 1444; BAPD 301734; *ABV* 325; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 88. On this vase and others representing satyrs beneath the handles, see Lissarrague 2013, 57–61.

**17** New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (Shelby White and Leon Levy Collection); BAPD 43275; von Bothmer 1991, 140–141.

**18** Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 81103; BAPD 13847; *CVA* Naples, Museo Nazionale 1, III.H.E.7, Plates 11.1–4.

**19** Paris, Musée du Louvre F19; BAPD 301316; *ABV* 241.28.



**Fig. 6.2:** Amphora by the Affecter, c. 540–530 BC, Paris, Musée du Louvre F19.

As mentioned above, handles posed quite a challenge for painters since they touch the upper part of the body and hence interrupt the continuum of the scenes. One of the solutions, as we just saw, was to diminish the scale of the figures; another was to depict figures who are seated. Even then, however, the result is not always satisfactory: consider an amphora in London (c. 500 BC),<sup>20</sup> where the handle actually overlaps the head of a warrior sitting on a block.

In some cases, we have the impression that the field under the handles is a discreet space for figures to hide and remain isolated. Many know the amphora signed by the potter Andokides and attributed to the Andokides Painter (c. 520 BC) in Berlin,<sup>21</sup> but only a few remember the crouching hare depicted at the base of each handle; it is as if the hares were hidden in a hole (Fig. 6.3). The relation of the hares to the two scenes on the amphora – representing Heracles and Apollo struggling for the tripod on one side, and young men wrestling on the other – is far from obvious. Should we consider the hare as a love token, adding erotic connotations to the wrestling scene (as with the flower held by the young and elegant referee)?<sup>22</sup> Although the suggestion is tempting, it must be pointed out that one hare is facing towards the wrestling scene, the other towards the mythological scene.

Under each handle of a krater in Berlin (c. 460–450 BC)<sup>23</sup> a youth stands as a silent and isolated spectator of the main scenes representing on one side Tithonos pursued by Eos, and on the other the departure of a warrior. The posture of the youth might remind us of Dionysus on the amphora by the potter Amasis discussed above (146–147): while the head is directed towards one of the scenes, his body is directed

<sup>20</sup> London, British Museum B294; BAPD 11931; *CVA* London, British Museum 4, Plates 71.3A–D.

<sup>21</sup> Berlin, Antikensammlung F2159; BAPD 200001; *ABV* 253.1; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 3.1; *Para* 320; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 149. On the scene's erotic connotations, see Frontisi-Ducroux 2012, 289.

<sup>22</sup> On hares as love tokens, see Schnapp 1997, 247–257 and 337–354. On the erotic connotations of flowers, see Kéi 2007; 2008; 2015; and 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Berlin, Antikensammlung F2371; BAPD 9025077; *CVA* Berlin, Antikensammlung 11, Plate 1.





**Fig. 6.3:** Amphora signed by the potter Andokides and attributed to the Andokides Painter, c. 520 BC, Berlin, Antikensammlung F2159.

towards the other. In this way, although isolated, both youths guarantee the visual continuity between the two autonomous scenes. Moreover, the fact that the youths are entirely wrapped in a mantle – a visual metaphor of their *aidôs*, of their shyness, modesty and timidity<sup>24</sup> – enhances their isolation from the surroundings.

As mentioned above, prestigious objects and architectural elements may occupy the area beneath the handles. But their presence should by no means be considered as an accessory to the scenes. Instead, they can sometimes operate as indicators of a sacred or domestic space. An amphora now in Göttingen (c. 530–520 BC)<sup>25</sup> shows, in a very minimalistic way, a crouching warrior (perhaps Achilles ambushing Troilos) on one side, and Apollo on the other. Under each handle, we find a tripod, a luxury and highly crafted object with semantic and ornamental properties.<sup>26</sup> Although isolated, the tripod is related to both sides of the vase: like the palm tree, it is not only an Apollonian attribute but also a topographical indicator of the god's sanctuary where Troilos was finally killed. Visually, the elongated form of the tripod is aligned with the vertical emphasis of the handles. One may even assert that its imposing presence, well adapted to the sub-handle area, goes hand in hand with its semantic importance.

On an amphora by the Affector (c. 540–530 BC)<sup>27</sup> a flaming altar constitutes the point at which a procession of men arrive, leading a ram to sacrifice. In this case, the central element of the visual narrative is figured on the liminal and visually less accessible space beneath the handle. The visual and semantic importance of the altar is enhanced by the fact that it is flanked by two figures, a man at the head of the procession and a small-scale woman, most probably a priestess. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the sacrifice is connected to Dionysus (who is shown on one side of the vase).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> On the 'enveloping mantle' as a visual metaphor of *aidôs*, see Ferrari 1990 and 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Göttingen, Georg-August-Universität J12; BAPD 6901; CVA Göttingen 3, Plates 271–6.

<sup>26</sup> See also an amphora attributed to Group E: Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen J476; BAPD 310320; *ABV* 137.60; *Para* 55; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 37. On tripods as polyvalent signs, see Papalexandrou 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen J77; BAPD 301332; *ABV* 243.44; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 62.

<sup>28</sup> Under the other handle of the vase there are two men depicted to a smaller scale.

Another case of a handle motif that is highly important for understanding the main scene is found on a loutrophoros (c. 430–420 BC) in Boston:<sup>29</sup> a bridegroom leads the bride to his house, which is indicated by a slightly ajar double door under the handle. The door, revealing the nuptial bed within, marks a space of transition: literally, from one side of the vase to the other; and metaphorically, as the woman shifts in status from *parthenos* to wedded wife. Out of the chamber flies an Eros whose presence bewilders the woman who is shown standing beside him – once again, the area beneath the handle has a surprise effect. At the same time, the motif also creates an impression of depth, since we have here three planes of representation: Eros, the door and the bed.<sup>30</sup> As on the previously discussed Munich Affekter amphora, this loutrophoros clearly shows that, although the handle area is marginal within the vase's architecture, it could host motifs that are of primary importance for the semantics of the main scene(s). The point should encourage us to question the widespread premise of a difference in semantic density between the main picture field (most often figural) and the handle area (most often ornamental), the former usually being considered to be more important than the latter.

A pelike attributed to the Painter of Tarquinia 707 (c. 450 BC) nicely demonstrates the inaccuracy of this premise. On one side, the pelike shows a woman in a chariot accompanied by a woman holding torches; on the other, a youth is portrayed in a chariot, accompanied by a woman holding libation instruments.<sup>31</sup> Quite unexpectedly, however, the main figures are represented on the lateral sides: in one scene, Dionysus, seated on a chair, holds a kantharos in one hand and, in the other, a vine branch and thyrsus (the upper part of which is painted *on* the handle itself); on the other, Heracles, seated on a rock, holds a club and a kantharos, whereas his quiver and bow are depicted hanging above him (and once again *on* the handle). Obviously, the central figure of this awkward representation is Heracles since the two chariots are directed towards him while moving away from Dionysus.

A pelike in the manner of the Leningrad Painter (c. 450–425 BC)<sup>32</sup> perfectly sums up what has so far been said about vases with vertical handles: namely, that the handle area joining and disjoining the two sides of the vase can be visually heightened and semantically charged despite its physical marginality (Figs. 6.4a–b). The main scene shows Peleus wrestling with Thetis: a diminutive panther and a snake suggest Thetis' animal transformations in order to escape the aggressor. Beneath one handle stands a vertical element (perhaps the trunk of a tree), close to which are

<sup>29</sup> Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 03.802; BAPD 15815; Reeder 1995, 166–167, n. 24.

<sup>30</sup> A half-open door revealing a bridal bed figures also beneath the handle of a loutrophoros-hydria attributed to the Marlay Painter (c. 430 BC): Athens, Benaki Museum 35495; BAPD 216204; ARV<sup>2</sup> 1277.17.

<sup>31</sup> Brussels, Musées Royaux R235; BAPD 214829; ARV<sup>2</sup> 1121.11. The vertical handles of pelikai constitute an even greater challenge for painters than those of (for example) amphoras and kraters because their attachments are placed not in the upper but in the middle part of the vase's body.

<sup>32</sup> Paris, Musée du Louvre G 373; BAPD 206594; ARV<sup>2</sup> 573.9; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 262.



**Fig. 6.4a:** Pelike in the manner of the Lenin-grad Painter, c. 450–425 BC, Paris, Musée du Louvre G 373.



**Fig. 6.4b:** Other side of the same pelike.

depicted a rock and a coiled snake (Fig. 6.4a). A palmette is painted on the lower part of the handle, as is usually the case on pelikai: it has no figural or semantic function. It is interesting, though, that its spotted border (a singular occurrence, so far as I know) recalls the snake's skin and the panther's coat: all of them create an effect of *poikilia*, that is of a variegated impression.<sup>33</sup> Even more interesting is the scene on the other side of the vase, where Thetis' sisters run to the altar (and to the figure of Nereus who stands beside it). The scene ends with the figure of Cheiron, whose torso is actually depicted on the handle so as to project out from the pelike's contained pictorial field (Fig. 6.4b). Once again, the arrangement has a real three-dimensional effect: as viewers, we have the impression that the centaur is closer to us, emerging out of the vase. It should also be noted that, while the figure of the centaur overlaps the handle, on the other side, it is the handle that overlaps the Nereids.

<sup>33</sup> On the *poikilia* of snakes and panthers, see Grand-Clément 2011, 439–441, 444–447; on similar effects created through the painterly representation of armour, see Lissarrague's chapter in this volume.

## Horizontal handles

Horizontal handles create different visual effects from vertical handles: their arched form draws the viewers' attention to the emblazoned sub-handle motifs, which become focal points outside the main scenes. Nevertheless, many of the same observations made about the area around vertical handles play out in the case of the space around horizontal ones.

A stamnos by the Harrow Painter (c. 470 BC)<sup>34</sup> shows Heracles fighting against the Nemean Lion; Athena and a woman watch the deed on the main side, while Hermes, Poseidon and a woman are shown on the reverse. Heracles' *panoplia* are duly found in the area around the handles: his mantle, bow and quiver are shown under one handle, while his club is shown under the other. Isolated and free-standing, these attributes attract the viewer's eye while also emphasising the fact that Heracles is fighting with bare hands. The mantle, quiver and bow are further highlighted by a second arch formed by the extended arm of a woman and that of Hermes, prolonged by his *kerykeion*: their gestures suggest their utter astonishment at Heracles' deed.

In other cases, the handles of stamnoi overlap figures and objects. Consider a stamnos by the Providence Painter (c. 475–450 BC), portraying a divine assembly.<sup>35</sup> Through one handle, a stable architectural element, runs a column; through the other is Hermes, a god always in motion who, like Dionysus, presides over boundaries and transitions and who is therefore in the right place.<sup>36</sup> Hermes looks towards Poseidon, but his right foot is oriented towards Hera on the opposite side – a posture that is often adopted by figures placed on the handle area in order to assure a narrative continuation between the two sides of the vase.<sup>37</sup> The liminality of Hermes is also suggested on a fragmentary cup attributed to the Brygos Painter (c. 490–480 BC)<sup>38</sup> on which the god, still an infant, rests in a cradle that has been placed close to a rocky cave occupying the space around the handle. The cave is that of Mount Kyllene, Maia's deep-shadowed dwelling – it is Hermes' secret birthplace, and the hiding place for the cattle that the young god stole from Apollo.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen 2407; BAPD 202871; ARV<sup>2</sup> 274.35.

<sup>35</sup> Paris, Musée du Louvre G370; BAPD 207405; ARV<sup>2</sup> 639.54; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 273; Laurens and Lissarrague 1990, 54–73 (esp. 60).

<sup>36</sup> See Vernant 1985, 155–201. The idea of transition is also conveyed by winged deities depicted in the sub-handle area of nuptial vases. See, for example, a lebes attributed to the Washing Painter in New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.286.35; BAPD 214881; ARV<sup>2</sup> 1126.1; *Para* 453; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 332) and a lebes in Hanover (Museum August Kestner 1966.116; BAPD 8737; *CVA* Hanover 1, 51–52, Plates 41.1–4).

<sup>37</sup> See the Amasis amphora in Boston and the krater in Berlin discussed above (nn. 14, 23).

<sup>38</sup> Princeton, University Art Museum 1990–1992. Images of the cup can be found on the museum's official website. See also a very similar cup by the same painter in the Vatican (Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 16582; BAPD 203905; ARV<sup>2</sup> 369.6; *Para* 367; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 224).

<sup>39</sup> *Hom. Hymn Herm.* 1–19, 142–149, 170–172, 228–234.

The cup by the Brygos Painter suggests that rocky caves and mountains, indicating as they do liminal and remote spaces, are particularly appropriate for the handle area, which is visually less accessible than the rest of the vase. By way of parallel, consider too a fragmentary cup by Makron (c. 490–480 BC),<sup>40</sup> which shows Zeus handing over the infant Dionysus to the nymphs. The episode takes place on Mount Nysa, indicated here by the rocky terrain and conifers in the handle area, and marked out by the use of outline technique. This shift in technique emphasises the fact that Mount Nysa is a faraway, unspoiled hiding place.<sup>41</sup>

Although the area beneath the handles is even smaller on vases with horizontal handles than on those with vertical ones, there are no limits to what may be depicted in this space: the range extends from a tiny insect (cf. below, 159–161) to the walls of a city, as on a cup attributed to the Euergides Painter (c. 520–500 BC).<sup>42</sup> This vase shows an episode from the Trojan War: on one side, we see two running warriors and a horseman, one of them named ‘Hector’; on the reverse, we see another running warrior, an armed horseman and a nude boy named ‘Telephus’. The space around and within one handle is occupied by the walls and gate of Troy. Beneath the other handle we find a square base on which seven circular shapes lie (Figs. 6.5): we are looking here at a table topped with a board-game, and we see the two figures either side fixated on the game.<sup>43</sup> Despite their completely different scale, the two handle motifs – one showing the walls of the city, the other a table topped with a board-game – are closely linked. After all, the game being played here might plausibly be identified as the *polis* board-game: the board itself represents a city’s territory and a battlefield, just as its pieces represent the armies of two cities.<sup>44</sup> By two completely different means, in other words, the two handle motifs may refer to one and the same space.

Although particularly confined, the area beneath horizontal handles is frequently occupied by what we may call spatial indicators which are almost always related to the main scenes: not just city walls, trees, columns, rocks, but also *loutêria* (‘washing

<sup>40</sup> Athens, National Archaeological Museum B76; BAPD 204701; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 460.20; *Para* 377; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 244.

<sup>41</sup> See also Frankfurt, Liebighaus STV7; BAPD 204131; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 386, 398.7; *Para* 521; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 229. A shift in technique occurs also in the handle-zone of a cup by the Andokides Painter in Palermo (Museo Archeologico Regionale 2051; BAPD 200014; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 5.14, 37.1; *Para* 114, 321; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 66, 150).

<sup>42</sup> London, British Museum E10; BAPD 200728; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 90.33; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 170.

<sup>43</sup> Needless to say, that scene recalls the famous amphora of Exekias in the Vatican (discussed briefly by Grethlein in this volume: Fig. 3.5; Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 344; BAPD 310395; *ABV* 145.13; *Para* 60; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 40). The cup is even closer to an eye-cup attributed to the Amasis Painter, showing in each handle area two seated male winged figures playing a board-game: Copenhagen, National Museum 13521; BAPD 504; *CVA* Copenhagen, National Museum 8, Plate 326. On the board-game played by Achilles and Ajax, see Mackay 2010, 332–339; Dasen 2015, 81–98 and esp. 90–91. A board-game is also represented in the handle zone of a fragmentary cup signed by Brygos: Athens, Acropolis Museum 5791; BAPD 204332; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 398.13.

<sup>44</sup> On this game see Hansen 2002; cf. also Kurke 1999.

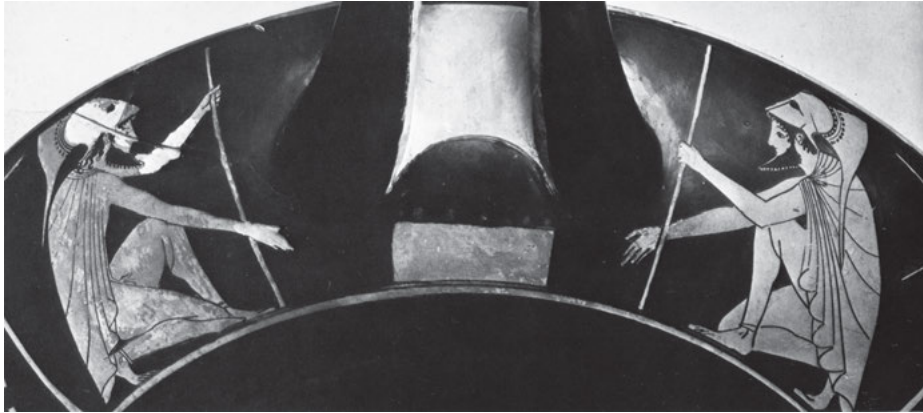


Fig. 6.5: Cup by the Euergides Painter, c. 520–500 BC, London, British Museum E10.

basins'), pillars or athletic and sympotic paraphernalia. A skyphos by the Zephyros Painter (c. 460–450 BC) shows male figures working out on a sports ground (*palaiestra*).<sup>45</sup> Instead of the floral frame that the painter usually depicts, we see, beneath one handle, a nude youth bending over his hoe to smooth the soil, and on the other, objects denoting a gymnastic space: a pillar marks the start or end of a running track, a pair of sandals, athletic equipment (an aryballos and strigil) and a large *loutêrion*. The pillar and basin both serve as a surface for writing: on them, we read the Greek adjective *kalos*, meaning 'handsome'. In a similar way, on the pointed amphora depicted beneath the handle of a cup signed by the potter Euphronios and attributed to Onesimos (c. 490–480 BC),<sup>46</sup> we read *ho pais* – which refers either to a boy or a slave. These inscriptions clearly invite the viewer to focus on the margins of the main scene(s) and read them out aloud.

A good example of how significant the handle motifs may be, even though marginalised on the material space of the vase, is a cup by Makron (c. 490–480 BC) showing a symposium on both of its exterior sides.<sup>47</sup> A *pais* is depicted under one handle: his small size denotes his young age as well as his status as a slave or servant.<sup>48</sup> Visually, this *pais*, holding an oinochoe and a strainer, is counterbalanced by the large wreathed krater shown beneath the other handle, from which the *pais* will draw some more wine for the guests. As François Lissarrague has noted, the *pais* and the krater are not marginalised, at least in the context of the 'real' symposium taking place in the *andrôn*; they must be put in their proper place, at the centre of the cel-

<sup>45</sup> Previously in the Hirschmann Collection G18; BAPD 7205; Bloesch (ed.) 1982, 80–81, n. 39.

<sup>46</sup> Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 95.27; BAPD 203223; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 325.76; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 216.

<sup>47</sup> New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 20.246; BAPD 204800; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 467.118; *Para* 378; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 245.

<sup>48</sup> As pointed out above, representing young boys in a smaller scale is a very convenient way of filling the half-sized space.

ebriation.<sup>49</sup> On another cup by the same painter,<sup>50</sup> also showing a symposium, the *pais*, exhausted from serving the guests, rests in a squatting position under one of the handles. He is now a fixed element, just like the calyx-krater with the ivy wreath placed below the opposite handle. He also has something of the satyrs' indecent behaviour about him: after all, he exhibits his genitals – a posture that signals his slave status but also attracts the viewer's attention.

In the case of a cup attributed to the Painter of the Fourteenth Brygos (c. 490–480 BC), representing the ransom of Hector (cf. Hom. *Il.* 24.440–676),<sup>51</sup> the motif under the handle seems to operate as a link between the space represented on the vase and the real space in which the vase was used. Indeed, the volute-krater depicted under one of the handles has an ambiguous function: it may be part of the ransom or it may just indicate the context of symposium where the cup itself was manipulated and admired. In both cases, it serves as the transition point between the two sides of the vase representing the encounter between Achilles and Priam followed by Hermes at the head of a long procession of gift-bearers. A door and a *klismos* with a leather seat cover, most probably intended for Priam,<sup>52</sup> mark the end of the narration under the other handle.

As pointed out above, prestigious objects displayed beneath the handle are semantically highlighted despite being visually marginalised within the architecture of the vase. This is particularly true for those objects which are emblazoned in the area defined by the arched handles of cups. In some cases, the fact that these objects bear a variegated decor accentuates their ornamentality, while a reserved patch of red colour above them creates a spotlight effect. On a cup by the Brygos Painter (c. 490–480 BC),<sup>53</sup> for example, we see a Corinthian helmet and a shield under one handle, and a pair of greaves under the other (Fig. 6.6): these objects constitute central motifs, allowing viewers to identify the two scenes on of the cup, namely as the quarrel over the arms of Achilles on one side, and the resulting vote to determine ownership on the other. Like the arms of Heracles represented on the stamnos by the Harrow Painter (above, 153), the arms of Achilles here attract the viewer's attention not only by their isolation in the handle area, but also by their elaborate craftsmanship – as evidenced by the chequer-board pattern on the caul of the helmet and the detailed modelling of the greaves.<sup>54</sup>

By definition, as we have emphasised, the handle area is a disjoining configuration within the architecture of the vase. But the important contribution of handle

<sup>49</sup> Lissarrague 1987, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Chestnut Hill, Boston College, McMullen Museum of Art; BAPD 2573; Kunisch 1997, n. 47, Plate 21.

<sup>51</sup> New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Shelby White and Leon Levy Collection; BAPD 204333; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 399; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 230; von Bothmer (ed.) 1991, 158–161, n. 118.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Hom. *Il.* 24.578.

<sup>53</sup> London, British Museum E69; BAPD 203901; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 369.2; *Para* 365; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 224.

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed description of the arms' decoration, see *CVA*, London, British Museum 9, 58.



Fig. 6.6: Cup by the Brygos Painter, c. 490–480 BC, London, British Museum E69.

motifs in joining the two sides of a vase together is nicely illustrated by the exterior of a cup signed by Peithinos (c. 500 BC) that depicts a series of erotic encounters (Fig. 6.7).<sup>55</sup> While a hunting dog beneath one handle guides the viewer's eye from the side of homosexual wooing to the side of heterosexual courtship, an elaborate stool – covered by a lion skin – marks the end of the scene beneath the opposite handle. Both elements are signs that affirm the social status and wealth of the male lovers.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the dog and the lion skin suggest that amorous courtship is itself a kind of hunt: the object of desire, girl or boy, is likened to a wild animal that the lover, as predator, has to capture.<sup>57</sup> By extension, it is worth noting that the interior of the cup represents the wrestling match between Peleus and Thetis (who tries to escape her attacker by taking the form of a snake and a lion, the latter clearly echoing the lion skin on the cup's exterior).

On a cup by Makron portraying a divine assembly (c. 490–480 BC),<sup>58</sup> elegant spotted felines (cheetahs or panthers) walk beneath the handles and guide the spectator's eye from left to right. Even though it is not clear if they are linked to Dionysus (who occupies the centre of one side), these displayed animals at once advertise wealth, exotic flamboyance and power;<sup>59</sup> at the same time, they create an effect of *poikilia*, enhanced by the cloth-covered folding chairs and the metallic vases.

<sup>55</sup> Berlin, Antikensammlung F2279; BAPD 200977; ARV<sup>2</sup> 115.2; *Para* 332; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 174.

<sup>56</sup> On dogs in ancient texts and imagery, see Calder 2011, 81–89.

<sup>57</sup> On the link between hunting and erotic desire, see Schnapp 1997, 247–257 and 337–354.

<sup>58</sup> Bochum, Kunstsammlungen der Ruhr-Universität S1062; BAPD 13378; *CVA*, Bochum, Kunstsammlungen der Ruhr-Universität 2, Kunstsammlungen, Plate 42.

<sup>59</sup> On felines in ancient texts and imagery, see Calder 2011, 87–89.



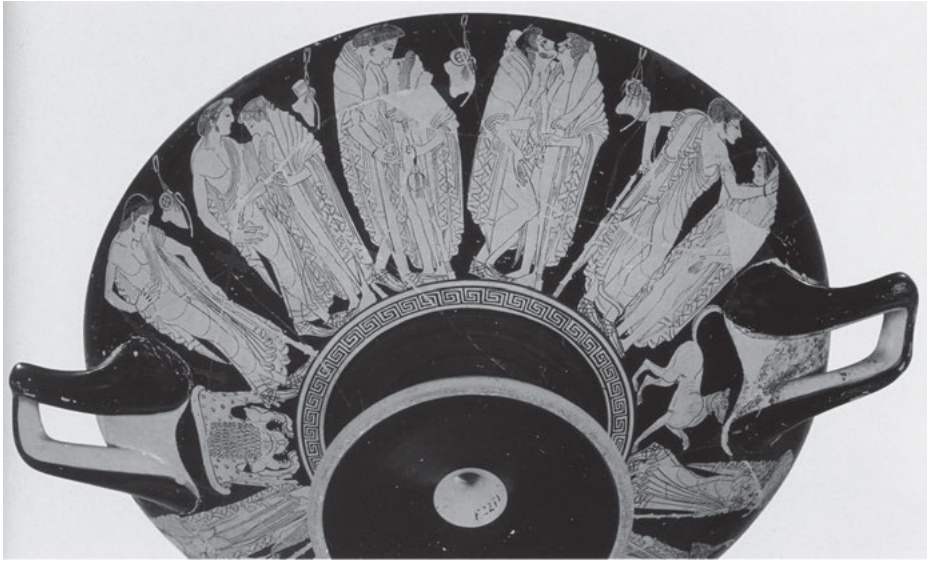


Fig. 6.7: Cup signed by Peithinos, c. 500 BC, Berlin, Antikensammlung F2279.

All these elements create a visual richness, encouraging the viewer to engage in a detailed examination of both scenes.

One category of handle motifs that has not been mentioned so far is that of hybrid creatures which may operate (just as animals) both as ornaments and polyvalent signs. A cup attributed to the Euergides Painter (c. 510 BC)<sup>60</sup> shows Peleus seizing Thetis on one side and Hermes and Nereids running towards Nereus on the other. The scenes are framed by two winged hippocamps: the hippocamps face inwards, and their tails cross each other between the handle attachments so as to form an elaborate ornament. Even though the seahorses do not participate actively in the scene, their presence evokes a maritime landscape and conveys the idea of velocity.

An animal can also operate as the personal signature of a painter or a potter. So it is, for example, that the Theseus Painter, chief painter of the Heron Class, ‘signs’ his skyphoi with a bird (heron or crane) beneath the handles – as, for instance, on a skyphos (c. 500 BC) in New York which shows scenes of male wrestling on each of its sides.<sup>61</sup> The fact that the bird is painted white enhances its particular status as a trademark. In general, the presence of the bird on the painter’s skyphoi is not connected to the main scenes;<sup>62</sup> however, it might actually refer to other vases produced

<sup>60</sup> London, British Museum E9; BAPD 200738; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 89.13; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 170.

<sup>61</sup> New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 06.1021.49; BAPD 306785; *ABV* 703; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 129.

<sup>62</sup> The Theseus Painter also uses a goat as a signature. On the Heron Class, see *ABV* 205, 617.

in the same workshop. If this is true, then the handle motifs do not only link the different scenes of a vase, but also forge an association between different vases.<sup>63</sup>

The dolphin, often found beneath the handles of the vases by the Leafless Group, is another example of such signature-motifs.<sup>64</sup> But this hallmark function does not exclude a semantic function within the vase's figurative programme. Indeed, beneath each handle of an eye-cup in Leiden (c. 520–510 BC) that shows Dionysus and satyrs,<sup>65</sup> a leaping dolphin appears with an arching back that echoes the form of the handles itself; a kind of necklace is also added to accentuate the ornamental properties. The presence of the dolphins contributes to the sympotic sea imagery: it is well known that Greeks compared the company of a symposium with that of a ship – and by extension the behaviour of symposiasts with sailing and rowing, or indeed intoxication from wine with seasickness.<sup>66</sup> This also explains why we sometimes find ships under the handles of cups.<sup>67</sup>

So far in this chapter, I have tried to systematise the great variety of handle motifs and explain their visual and semantic effects. But numerous examples evade such attempts to tie down meaning. If there is common ground between the examples that follow, rather, it is surely their unexpected presence. Consider first a cup attributed to the Amasis Painter (c. 520 BC):<sup>68</sup> on one side two reclining satyr-like revellers are shown masturbating; on the other an eye-siren points at a dog defecating between the attachments of the handles (Fig. 6.8). The same motif appears under the other handle. The obscenity of the dogs is doubled by the fact that, in Attic comedy, the word *kyôn* could refer to the phallus.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, these defecating dogs, both looking towards the eye-siren but linked to the masturbation scene, constitute a 'marginalised' visual joke that would certainly provoke surprise and hilarity among the pot's users.

Also unexpected is the presence of insects in the handle area. The exterior of a cup signed by the potter Pamphaios and attributed to the Nikosthenes Painter (c. 520–500 BC)<sup>70</sup> shows Heracles and Iolaos fighting against the centaurs on one side

**63** It should be noted here that the handle area receives not only 'figurative trademarks' but also real signatures: the potter Hischylos signs beneath the handle; the potters Euphronios, Hieron, Brygos and Charinos sign on the handle of their vases. These signatures, painted or incised, are usually written in a tightly delicate and decorative way; their presence certainly distinguishes the handle area. More generally on potters' signatures, see Cohen 1991 – along with e. g. Hurwit 2015, 71–96 (with review and further bibliography in Squire 2017).

**64** On the Leafless Group, see *ABV* 632–654, 711–713, 716; *Para* 310–314, 520; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 145–146. A leaf, a flying bird or a drinking horn may also figure as handle 'signatures' of the Leafless Group.

**65** Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden PC14; BAPD 769; *CVA* Leiden 2, 10, Plates 62.4–6, 63.2.

**66** On sympotic sea imagery, see Lissarrague 1987, 104–118.

**67** See, for example, an eye-cup in Copenhagen (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek 3385; BAPD 340395; *Para* 104; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 57).

**68** Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 10.651; BAPD 310515; *ABV* 157.86; *Para* 65; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 46.

**69** Henderson 1991, 127, 133.

**70** Los Angeles, County Museum 50.8.15; BAPD 201039; *ARV<sup>2</sup>* 125.11, 128; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 176.



Fig. 6.8: Cup by the Amasis Painter, c. 520 BC, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 10.651.

and, on the reverse, Hermes, Heracles and Athena harnessing a chariot. An ivy leaf stands beneath one handle, a grasshopper or a locust (*akris*)<sup>71</sup> beneath the other. Both of the insects are enlarged. The presence of the ivy leaf has a clear-cut meaning: it is a Dionysian sign, accentuating the cup's use in the symposium. The presence of the grasshopper (which looks on towards the Centauromachy scene) is less easy to explain. It may be that the insect gives the scene a natural context, rather like the tree depicted behind Heracles. The fact that the grasshopper stridulates, 'sings' and 'makes music with its wings'<sup>72</sup> may further explain this placement: after all, Attic viewers termed the handles of vases 'ears' (*ta ôta* in ancient Greek).<sup>73</sup> Finally, because it eats plants, the grasshopper may convey an idea of destruction and harm,<sup>74</sup> a very suitable idea given the Centauromachy scene of our cup.

71 Apparently, Greeks did not draw a distinction between grasshoppers, crickets and locusts, and some poets even confused grasshoppers with cicadas: Davies-Kathirithamby 1986, 134.

72 Davies-Kathirithamby 1986, 136–137.

73 I owe this remark to Ludi Chazalon – who is also interested in the handle area of Greek vases: see Chazalon 2013. Indeed, on an amphora in Oxford, a satyr plays the lyre below one of the handles (Ashmolean Museum 1965.125; BAPD 352183; *Para* 295; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 140). See also an amphora in London (British Museum B264; BAPD 320322; *ABV* 288.19; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 75) and a cup fragment in Paris (Musée du Louvre CA1778; BAPD 302599; *ABV* 201; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 54), both showing a satyr playing aulos.

74 Davies-Kathirithamby 1986, 139–141. Note that our grasshopper stands on the palmette chain.

A cup in the manner of the Nikosthenes Painter (c. 520–510 BC)<sup>75</sup> shows a Dionysian procession with satyrs and maenads extending over both sides. Under one handle, we find a bee or wasp (*melissa/apis* or *sphêx*)<sup>76</sup> looking towards another scene where a woman mounts a chariot. Once again, it is difficult to decipher the role of the bee, especially since it operates as a polyvalent sign. Wild bees often feature in countryside descriptions in Greek literature;<sup>77</sup> consequently, it is possible that our bee, standing above the palmette chain, enhances the impression of a natural context, rather like the grasshopper on the Pamphaios cup. Like grasshoppers, bees likewise produce a very characteristic sound, which may also explain the bee's presence below the cup's 'ear'.<sup>78</sup> Finally, the bee may convey Dionysian overtones, when we remember that the infant Dionysus was nurtured on honey.<sup>79</sup>

The presence of these insects once again returns us to the question of scale. While, in general, the reduced height of the area beneath the handles invites the painter to depict miniaturised figures and objects in order to make them fit, we find the exact opposite phenomenon here: the size of the insects has been enlarged – which proves that the handle area is a space that is variable in scale. In addition, the disproportionate presence of these normally tiny creatures together with their visual isolation would undoubtedly stimulate and direct the attention of viewers towards them.

What about floral elements? Floral elements – and especially palmettes – are the most common handle motifs; traditionally, they have been judged to play a purely ornamental function in framing the main figural scene. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, however, floral elements escape our modern and fictitious categories by operating in multiple ways: as ornaments, as narrative agents, and as polyvalent signs.<sup>80</sup> The following two examples suffice to suggest this polytropic nature.

Consider first the exterior scenes of a cup by the Brygos Painter (c. 490–480 BC).<sup>81</sup> The cup shows scenes from the sack of Troy: although compositionally self-contained, the scenes are linked by the figure of a fallen Trojan under one handle, just as a palmette under the other handle marks the beginning and end of the narration. Importantly, the palmette is overlapped by the figure of Astyanax fleeing to the right:

<sup>75</sup> St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum B3375; BAPD 9030175; CVA St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum 8, Plates 13–15.

<sup>76</sup> As Nitzan Levin notes, 'Greek literature often associates, compares and confuses the two species. Thus, it is not surprising to find a similar confusion in the work of vase painters of the sixth century' (Levin 2016, 83). On bees and wasps in antiquity, see also Davies-Kathirithamby 1986, 47–83.

<sup>77</sup> Davies-Kathirithamby 1986, 51.

<sup>78</sup> Davies-Kathirithamby 1986, 53–54 and 70–72.

<sup>79</sup> Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1132–1136.

<sup>80</sup> On floral elements as ornaments and polyvalent signs, see Kéi 2007; 2008; 2015; 2016; cf. also the discussion of the 'Euphorbus Plate' in the introduction to this volume (3–16), as well as the discussions of the Eleusis amphora by both Grethlein and Neer.

<sup>81</sup> Paris, Musée du Louvre G152; BAPD 203900; ARV<sup>2</sup> 369.1; *Para* 365; *Add<sup>2</sup>* 224.

it is as if the palmette were not there. Furthermore, the fact that Astyanax refuses to recognise the limit of the scene increases his agony and the overall dramatic tension of the imagery.<sup>82</sup> In other words, the palmette is not only an ornament but also a narrative operator.

Even more interesting is a cup by Makron (c. 490–480 BC), now in Berlin.<sup>83</sup> The handle areas framing the main scene of the cup, which shows the Judgment of Paris, are occupied by goats and the rock on which Paris is seated on one side, and by a stylised palmette garland on the other (Fig. 6.9). Here, we have two different logics of representation: one that is figurative (the rock and the goats), and one that is rather more ornamental (the palmette garland). Yet both of these logics have semantic implications. The rock and the goats characterise Paris as a shepherd.<sup>84</sup> In a similar way, the palmettes qualify Aphrodite: as adornments, they denote her beauty, her charm, her sweet scent, her *charis*.<sup>85</sup> It is as if the palmette garland is inextricably interwoven with Aphrodite, who is shown surrounded by four fluttering Erotes holding red floral tendrils. After all, Aphrodite is the winner of Paris' judging – and therefore merits the viewer's undivided attention. In this particular case, the palmettes are again not just ornaments, but also potential narrative agents and signs. By contrast, on the other side of the cup – which shows Paris leading Helen away – the rock, goats and palmettes lose their semantic potency since they are not really related to the figures.

There are a few cases where the handle actively participates in the narration. On a skyphos by the Heron Class close to the style of the Theseus Painter (c. 500–490 BC),<sup>86</sup> Heracles has hung his lion skin *on* the handle as if it were a tree branch. Likewise, on a contemporary cup showing Heracles' fight against Antaios, the hero's club leans against the handle.<sup>87</sup> Finally, on a cup by Onesimos (c. 500–480 BC),<sup>88</sup> a satyr is preparing himself to attack a maenad by bracing his foot against the handle. In all cases, the handle is to be considered as a real figurative element. This confirms, from a different perspective, what has already been observed in various ways: although marginal within the vase's architecture, the handle area is interacting closely with the main pictorial field, asserting the continuity between figure and ornament.

I will conclude with a group of vases on which we find a particular effect: in these cases, the only field occupied by figures is the area beneath the handles, while the

**82** Astyanax reappears on the other side of the vase: his dead body is held in the hands of Neoptolemus.

**83** Berlin, Antikensammlung F2291; BAPD 204685; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 459.4, 481; *Para* 377; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 244.

**84** On 'landscape' elements as extensions of figures, see Dietrich 2010.

**85** On floral elements and flowers, see above, n. 80.

**86** Athens, National Archaeological Museum 13907; BAPD 46504; *CVA* Athens, National Museum 4, Plates 44.1–4. Beneath the other handle of the vase is a tree.

**87** Athens, National Archaeological Museum 1666; BAPD 350911; *CVA* Athens, National Museum 1, III.I.C.4, Plates 4–5. On this cup, see Dietrich 2010, 118–120, 279–308 (esp. 297–298).

**88** Aleria, Musée Archeologique 61.35; BAPD 275179; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1645.9bis; *Para* 359; *Add*<sup>2</sup> 215.



**Fig. 6.9:** Cup by Makron, c. 490–480 BC, Berlin, Antikensammlung F2291.

rest of the vase is decorated with an abstract ‘textile’ pattern.<sup>89</sup> The Beldam Workshop and the Marlay Group particularly favour this kind of ornamentation. Thus, a skyphos by the Beldam Workshop (c. 450 BC)<sup>90</sup> is mainly decorated with the abstract pattern of a chequerboard, complete with a laurel wreath on the rim, a frontal owl below the vertical handle and a panther and two birds below the horizontal handle. A cup attributed to the Lid Painter (c. 440–430 BC)<sup>91</sup> is decorated with a panel of lozenges flanked by two panels of inverted black lotus buds while the handle area is occupied by a goat in silhouette. In these cases, should the motifs be designated as ‘superfluous’, ‘accessories’ or ‘peripheral’? Indeed, how do the motifs of the handle zone relate to the design of the main part of the vase?

<sup>89</sup> On such patterns, cf. also Lissarrague’s chapter in this volume.

<sup>90</sup> London, British Museum E151; BAPD 16815; CVA London, British Museum 4, III.Ic.5, Plates 32.11a–d.

<sup>91</sup> London, British Museum 1917.0726.2; BAPD 216281; ARV<sup>2</sup> 1283.13. See also a cup by the same painter in Madrid (Museo Arqueológico Nacional, coll. Varez Fisa 1999.99.83; BAPD 44388).

Allow me to end this chapter by bringing together some of my overarching arguments. Throughout, I have been arguing that what we traditionally call the ‘figurative’ and ‘ornamental’ registers on Attic vases – as indeed the ‘image’ and ‘frame’ of the painted pot – amount to fictitious, anachronistic western categories, conceived in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the purposes of classification and chronology. Ever since the Enlightenment, the majority of specialist scholars have considered these two categories as existing in a dialectical relationship: the former has been thought to occupy the centre of the pictorial field and to bear meaning; by contrast, the latter has been relegated to the margins and deemed parergonal. This dichotomous approach to Attic vase-painting – reflecting as it does an idea of the flat, gilt-framed canvas – implies a hierarchisation based on semantic density: the ‘ornamental register’ or ‘frame’ of the vase is considered to be, if not entirely meaningless, at least inferior to its ‘figurative register’ or ‘image’.

The aim of my chapter has been to show that, though visually less accessible, the area beneath the handles could be no less semantically loaded than the main pictorial field. By choosing elements with enriching, narrative and sometimes multi-layered semantic properties, Attic painters put the sub-handle area to clever use, while also assuring a continuity between ‘figurative’ and ‘ornamental’ elements. Far from being trivial space-fillers, these handle motifs – whether figures, objects or floral elements – perform an adverbial function: they underscore, heighten, clarify or qualify the meaning of the scenes that they frame. At the same time, they influence the process of visual reception in various ways: they separate or interconnect the two sides of a vase; they provide further guidance for the eyes of a viewer; they amount to eye-catching details; and sometimes they create a surprising effect. In certain cases, despite their physical marginality, the motifs under the handles even amount to the central motifs of a pot, contributing in a very active way to the visual experience of the vase. In my eyes, at least, there can therefore be no doubt: our western and academic categories of ‘ornament’ and ‘figure’ not only prevent the modern viewer from having a more complete appreciation of the vase as a whole, but also deprive him of the aesthetic and intellectual pleasure that this may engender.

## Abbreviations

ABV: Beazley, J. D. (1956) *Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters*. Oxford.

Add<sup>2</sup>: Carpenter T. H., Mannack, T. and Mendonca, M. (1989) *Beazley Addenda: Additional References to Attic Black-figure Vase-painters, Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters and Paralipomena*, 2nd edn. Oxford.

ARV<sup>2</sup>: Beazley, J. D. (1963) *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*, 2nd edn. Oxford.

BAPD: Beazley Archive Pottery Database (cf. [www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/index.htm](http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/index.htm)).

CVA: (1922–) *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* (cf. <http://www.cvaonline.org/cva/Countrylist.htm>).

LIMC: (1981–1997) *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. Zurich and Munich.  
 Para: Beazley, J. D. (1971) *Paralipomena: Additions to Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters and to Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*. Oxford.

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## Image credits

- Fig. 6.1: After CVA Bochum, Kunstsammlungen der Ruhr-Universität 1, Plate 26.1.
- Fig. 6.2: Photograph by Nikolina Kéi.
- Fig. 6.3: Photograph by Nikolina Kéi.
- Fig. 6.4a: Photograph by Nikolina Kéi.
- Fig. 6.4b: Photograph by Nikolina Kéi.
- Fig. 6.5: After *LIMC* 1.2, s. v. 'Achilles', no. 101.
- Fig. 6.6: After CVA, London, British Museum 9, Plate. 61a.
- Fig. 6.7: After Backe-Dahmen, Kästner and Schwarzmaier 2010, fig. 51.
- Fig. 6.8: After CVA Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 2, Plate 101.3.
- Fig. 6.9: Photograph by Nikolina Kéi.