

A READING OF TWO FRAGMENTS OF SOPHILOS*

Abstract: Two fragments of a vase by Sophilos are remnants of the earliest extant representation of the myth of the contest between Athena and Poseidon at Athens.

This brief paper sets out a proposed reading of two fragments which come from the same vase, a *kotyle*-krater¹ from the early sixth century found on the Acropolis². The vase was painted by Sophilos, the first Athenian vase-painter to have signed his name,³ who was an iconographical innovator.⁴

The first fragment (PLATE 8 (a)) shows the upper parts of two female figures represented side by side and enveloped in the same mantle. One of the figures is inscribed ΠΑΝΔΡΟΣΟΣ. They are followed by a bearded male with a sceptre. Remnants of a *kerykeion* in front of the inscription show that these figures were preceded by Hermes.⁵ The mantle-sharing indicates a close relationship between the two female figures.⁶ Whether or not there were other inscriptions,⁷ in ancient eyes the inscription ΠΑΝΔΡΟΣΟΣ clearly identified the whole group. The second female figure is Aglauros who, like Pandrosos, but unlike Herse, was cultically embedded in Athenian religion.⁸ We know that Aglauros was an established figure at that time because the inscription [ΑΓΛΑ]ΥΠΟΣ survives on another fragment found on the Acropolis, also of the early sixth century, on which the inscription can be seen between two fragmentary female figures, the upper part of both of which is missing.⁹ The subject and context of this fragment is unrecoverable. The fragments of the image by Sophilos show that in the earliest representations the Kekropidai were a pair, not a triad.¹⁰ The bearded male with the sceptre following them was undoubtedly the figure of a king closely connected with both, their father Kekrops.¹¹

The other fragment from the vase by Sophilos belonged to the same side of the krater, which was decorated with only one figured scene (PLATE 8 (b)).¹² On it there is first, beginning on the

* This reading emerged in the course of the writing of a book concerning certain festivals and their cultic myth. It is therefore a very small (albeit independent) fragment of a much wider discourse which I thought I should expose here to immediate scrutiny.

¹ See Bakır (1981) 26.

² Athens, Nat. Mus. Akr. 585a (cf. *ABV* 40, 17; *Add.* 11; 580–570 BC), and 585b (cf. *ABV* 40, 18; *Add.* 11). On both, cf. Kron (1981) 286 no. 4; Bakır (1981) 26–7 (with figs 17–19), 68 A 17, Taf. 35–6 Abb. 64–5, 67–8; Shapiro (1989) 104–5 pl. 49c; Shapiro (1995) 42 and 41 fig. 4; Kilmer and Develin (2001) 26–7. I am very grateful to Mrs B. Stasinopoulou, Ephor of the Pottery Collection of the National Museum, Athens, for kindly allowing me to examine these fragments and also Athens, Nat. Mus. Akr. 780 mentioned below.

³ On Sophilos, see e.g., besides Bakır (1981), Mommsen (2001); Boardman (1974) 18–19; Sparkes (1996) 11–12; Osborne (1998) 88–91.

⁴ See e.g. his representation of the funeral games for Patroklos (on the dinos fragment Athens, Nat. Mus. 15499 from Pharsalos). On Sophilos as an iconographical innovator, see also Mommsen 2001; Bakır (1981) 2; cf. Osborne (1998) 90–1.

⁵ Though they admit that Hermes was one of Sophilos' favourite figures, Kilmer and Develin (2001) 27 state that because Iris can also be shown carrying the *kerykeion*, as she is in the two wedding dinoi, London, BM 1971.11–

1.1 (Bakır (1981) 64 no. A1) and the fragmentary dinos, Athens, Nat. Mus. 587 (Bakır (1981) 64–5 no. A2), it is impossible to be certain that it is Hermes who was represented here. However, Iris in those scenes is at the head of a procession of deities, not leading mortals towards a group of immortals. In any case, the meaning would not be radically different if the figure were Iris.

⁶ See Kron (1981) 294.

⁷ See Kron (1981) 294.

⁸ On Pandrosos, see esp. Kearns (1989) 192–3 with bibliography; Parker (2005) 219, 221–2, 434, 449; see also Gourmelin (2005) 151–7, 159–71 with bibliography. On Aglauros, see Parker (1987) 195–7; Kearns (1989) 24–7, 60–1, 139–40; Burkert (1990) 40–59 *passim*; Parker (2005) 216–17, 221–2, 427, 434, 449; see also Larson (1995) 39–41; Lupu (2005) 146–7 with bibliography; Gourmelin (2005) 69–70, 151–9, 162–71 with bibliography. For Herse being less rooted in cult than Aglauros and Pandrosos, see e.g. Burkert (1990) 47; Parker (2005) 434 n.63; see also Shapiro (1995) 42.

⁹ Athens, Nat. Mus. Akr. 780 (cf. *LIMC* s.v. 'Pandrosos' no. 1) of c. 570. The description in *LIMC* by Kron (1981), who had not seen the fragment, is not accurate.

¹⁰ See also Kron (1981) 294.

¹¹ Their mother was a shadowy figure who was sometimes nameless and sometimes called Aglauros like her daughter (Paus. 1.2.6; Apollod. 3.14.2).

¹² Bakır (1981) 26–7.

left, the head of a horse, which Bakır rightly showed is not one of a pair but a single horse, and was therefore either being ridden or had a figure standing beside it.¹³ Next to the horse is the inscription ΠΟΣΕΙΔΩΝ. To the right of the inscription we see the upper part of a bearded male with a female figure alongside him; they are both turned towards the right. Bakır thinks that the couple are standing on a chariot¹⁴ and remarks that it is difficult to decide whether the inscription ΠΟΣΕΙΔΩΝ belongs with the pair or with the figure associated with the horse,¹⁵ though in another context he identifies the couple as Poseidon and Amphitrite.¹⁶ However, the autopsy of the vase convinced me that this is not the case: the inscription ΠΟΣΕΙΔΩΝ is not only distant from (back of) the couple, it is so close to the horse as to be virtually touching its muzzle at one point, and it is hard to believe that the inscription belongs with the couple. I am now convinced that this inscription named the figure who was associated with the horse, and Poseidon was either riding the horse or, more probably, was represented alongside it.¹⁷

If it is right that ΠΟΣΕΙΔΩΝ was the name of the figure associated with the horse, who are the man and the woman on the chariot? All it is possible to say about this couple is that they are very likely to be a divine couple, for example Zeus and Hera.

At one end of the spectrum of tenable readings is the possibility that the subject of these two fragments cannot be determined,¹⁸ except in so far as to say that the scene is mythological. At the other end, I will now suggest, is a possible reconstruction of a context based on a step-by-step attempt to recover as much as possible of the ancient readings. Though it is true that this image may be articulating a myth that is totally unknown to us, I will suggest that there are reasons for thinking that it is in fact the first representation, indeed the first attestation, of a well-known and important Athenian myth.

Starting with the structure of the representation, the two groups were clearly facing each other. Pandrosos, Aglauros and Kekrops are moving towards the left, that is, they are shown being led in the direction of the group of divinities who are themselves moving towards the right. The image then represented not a procession, but the convergence of two groups to one place, and so a meeting, an occasion involving the participation of mortals on the one hand and immortals on the other. This is confirmed by the fact that Pandrosos, Aglauros and Kekrops were preceded by Hermes, the god who crosses borders and guides people between different worlds,¹⁹ and he presumably escorted them somewhere for which the escort of Hermes was appropriate: a meeting with the immortal gods would have been such an occasion.

Whoever else may have been part of the group of deities depicted on this vase, Poseidon is the one god that we know was represented amongst them. More specifically, he was represented in some kind of association with a horse, perhaps riding it, more probably alongside it. Therefore this image represents an occasion that involved Kekrops and his daughters being escorted to the presence of deities, one of whom was Poseidon who was depicted in association with a horse.

We do know of one event that took place in the world of the gods and involved Kekrops (and, we shall see, also his daughters), an occasion on which Poseidon was present, indeed prominent, and on which he was associated with a horse: the contest between Athena and Poseidon for the status of poliadic deity of Athens.²⁰ To quote Parker, Kekrops 'was certainly involved in the dispute, either as an actual judge ... or as a witness, the judges being the twelve gods'.²¹ As for the single horse associated with Poseidon, it helps to construct the reading of the scene proposed here, since

¹³ Bakır (1981) 27.

¹⁴ Bakır (1981) 27, 68.

¹⁵ Bakır (1981) 27.

¹⁶ Bakır (1981) 68. See also Shapiro (1989) 104-5.

¹⁷ Though it is true that Poseidon is the only Olympian represented riding a horse, he is shown in this schema only in red-figure vase-painting and there is no known black-figure representation on horse-back (Shapiro (1989) 109).

¹⁸ See e.g. Shapiro (1995) 42.

¹⁹ See Sourvinou-Inwood (1995) 104-5 with bibliography.

²⁰ On this myth, see esp. Parker (1987) 198-200; Palagia (2005) 242-53.

²¹ Parker (1987) 198.

in one version of the myth of the contest Poseidon gave the Athenians the gift of a horse, and though this version is attested only in Roman texts, iconographical evidence suggests that it was also current in the classical period.²²

I suggest that on the vase of which the two fragments discussed here were part Sophilos has represented the arrival of the participants and witnesses at the place where the contest between Athena and Poseidon was to be acted out and judged. This articulation of a myth through the representation of the arrival of the participants at an event was clearly one of Sophilos' preferred modalities, as is shown by the fact that two of his extant vases portray the gods' arrival at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis.²³

If this image to which the two fragments belonged was indeed a representation of the preliminary stages of the contest and judgement that would lead to the establishment of the cult of Athena Polias, the representation of Kekrops' daughters Pandrosos and Aglauros would be correlative with, and thus would have signified proleptically to the ancient viewers, Athena's victory and the establishment of that cult. For Aglauros was the first priestess of Athena Polias and Pandrosos was also closely associated with that cult.²⁴

I mentioned that, in one version of the myth, Kekrops was the judge.²⁵ I will now mention that in another version of the myth, attested in a very late and not necessarily reliable source, the daughters of the king (who is not named), who are here three in number, ultimately gave the victory to Athena. A scholion to Aristeides gives us a version of the myth in which the votes of men and women were equal, and Zeus said that the *oikos* of the then king had not voted, and since the king was one male with three daughters, Athena had won.²⁶ Though this source is very late and not necessarily reliable, the possibility cannot be totally excluded that it reflects (reshaped) elements from an earlier story, in which the daughters of Kekrops had some role, or at least some prominence, in connection with the contest. But whether or not this is right is not relevant. For in any case, in any version of the story of the contest, the representation of Aglauros and Pandrosos, who were closely associated with the cult of Athena Polias, constructed (which entails that Sophilos' selections were shaped by) the significant meaning that Athena would be victorious and Aglauros and Pandrosos would be serving her cult.

If this reading of the two fragments is right, they would be (remnants of) the earliest extant representation, the earliest extant reflection, of the myth of the contest between Athena and Poseidon. The earliest known attestations so far are in Herodotos²⁷ and on the Parthenon: the earliest certain, generally accepted, reflection of the myth in an image is on the west pediment of the Parthenon.²⁸ It has been claimed, in a hypothesis that has not gained much support, that the myth of the contest between Athena and Poseidon was created some time in, or around, the 470s.²⁹ If the reading proposed here is right, these fragments would give a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the myth in the 570s BC.

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²² See Palagia (2005) 243-4, 257 n.90.

²³ Two of his signed extant vases to be precise, the *dinoi* listed in n.7.

²⁴ See Kearns (1989) 24-7, 192-3.

²⁵ See e.g. Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.10; Apollod. 3.14.1 rejects this version.

²⁶ Scholion on Aelius Aristeides, *ad Panath.* 106.15 Jebb.

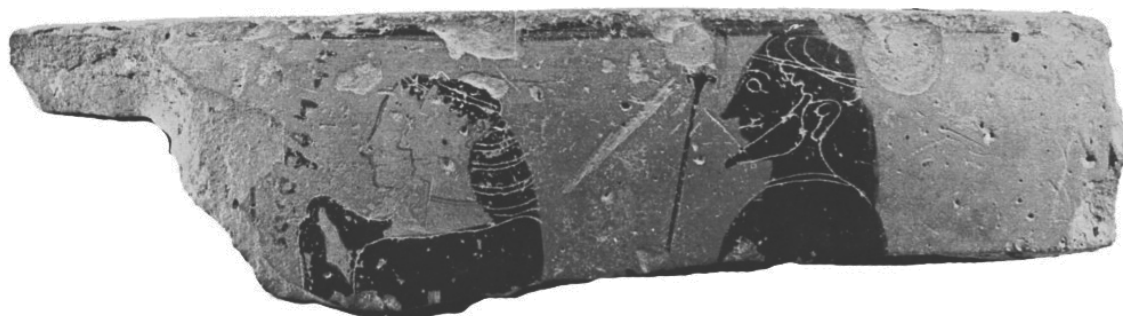
²⁷ Hdt. 8.55.

²⁸ On which see now esp. Palagia (2005) 242-53.

²⁹ Binder (1984) 15-22. See the critical discussion of this hypothesis in Parker (1987) 199-200; see also Shapiro (1989) 105.

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(a) Two women and a bearded man with sceptre
Athens, National Museum, Akr. 585
(Bakır G. (1981) pl 35, 64)



(b) Horse head and Poseidon
Athens, National Museum, Akr. 585
(Bakır G. (1981) pl.35, 65)

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