Sleeping Furies: Allegory, Narration and the Impact of Texts in Apulian Vase-Painting*

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Picture-vases in a funerary context

In this paper I shall discuss a few basic peculiarities of Apulian vase painting. I will proceed in two steps. First I shall concentrate on the difference between what I call narrative versus allegorical meaning; as meaning is always closely connected with function, I will start from the few things we know about the way Apulian vases were actually used. In the second part of the paper I shall concentrate on the iconography of (just) one mythological episode: we shall look at Orestes in Delphi, surrounded by the sleeping Furies, and we shall have to ask what can actually have been the reason for the painters to show Furies sound asleep.

But let us begin at the beginning. The production of red-figure vases on the Gulf of Tarentum starts around the middle of the fifth century: the technique is Attic, Attic is the shape of the vases, Attic their iconography; the first potters and painters must have been of Attic origin, having had their training in the Athenian Kerameikos. For about one generation the connection between Apulian and Attic vase-production remains rather close: but around 400 BC the immigration of Attic vase painters as well as the import of Attic vases comes to a sudden end: from this time at the latest vase-production in Apulia develops to become a phenomenon of its own.

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* Many thanks to David Wasserstein for suggesting the publication of my paper in this journal. I also thank an anonymous reader for pertinent criticism and some useful suggestions. In the footnotes I use the following abbreviations:
ARV^2: J.D. Beazley, *Attic Red-figure Vase-Painters*^{2} (1963).
LIMC: *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* 1-8 (1981-1997)
Paral: J.D. Beazley, *Paralipomena*^{2} (1971)
RVAp: A.D. Trendall and A. Cambitoglou, *The Red-figured Vases of Apulia* I-II (1978-1982); Suppl. 1 (1983); Suppl. 2 (1991-92)

One of the most striking differences from Attic vases concerns their function. In Athens most shapes of vases were mainly intended to be used at the symposion;[1] in Apulia there is a marked tendency away from practical usage. This can be safely assumed for the largest vases, such as volute craters. Originally vessels of this shape had the inside of the basin covered with a thin layer of glaze (which is important in order to prevent the clay from absorbing liquids); from the second quarter of the fourth century onwards the inside-glaze of Apulian volute craters stops a few inches under the lip: the basin remains unglazed and permeable — and this is true for *all* volute craters. Not quite as general, but even more evident is the phenomenon of vessels without a bottom: after the middle of the fourth century vases of high and narrow shape (e.g. *hydriai*, *loutrophoroi*, amphorae, but also volute craters) are often produced with an open hole between body and foot.[2] This has purely technical reasons: it facilitates the uniform drying of the clay inside as well as outside and it makes the firing process somewhat easier, allowing free circulation of the heat; on the other hand it obviously precludes any use of the vessel as a liquid container. Such permeable and/or bottomless vases have lost their practical function: once objects to be used, they have now become objects to be looked at; being no longer containers, they have become what I would like to call picture-vases.

Hand in hand with the loss of a practical function goes the development of a new iconography: the mythological subjects become richer, they acquire a degree of complexity which goes far beyond what we know from Attic vases and finds no equal in any other genre of ancient art. We shall have to ask about the reasons for this iconographic proliferation; obviously I am referring not to the whole production of Apulian pottery, but only to the upper class of Apulian red figure: vases of large dimension, high quality and probably high price — what Trendall used to call the Ornate Style.[3]

The vases being objects to be looked at, they were meant to be put on display: but on what occasion? The main clue comes from the iconography of the vases. From about 420 on we find smaller *hydriai* and amphorae with representations of a grave. The iconography is closely related to Attic prototypes, but there is an important difference. In Athens grave scenes were to be found only on vases connected with funerary ritual, for instance on

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1 There are of course some obvious exceptions such as *lekythoi*, *loutrophoroi*, *pyxides*, *aryballoi* etc.

2 See H. Lohmann, 'Zu technischen Besonderheiten apulischer Vasen', *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 97,1982, 210-49.

3 A.D. Trendall, *Red Figure Vases of South Italy and Sicily. A Handbook* (1989), 78f.

lekythoi; amphorae and *hydriai* being functionally related to the symposion, they never displayed images of sepulchral character:[4] but this general rule is valid only for Attic pottery. In Apulia the sepulchral iconography appearing on amphorae and *hydriai* indicates that the function of the vases must have changed: nobody would use a vessel with the depiction of a grave for a symposion, unless the symposion itself was closely connected with a funeral.

The typology of Apulian grave scenes is simple:[5] the grave is usually represented by a column or a stele; in some cases there is one single figure sitting at the foot of the monument, probably the deceased.[6] After about 370 more elaborate images begin to appear, where stele or column is replaced by a *naiskos*: a typically Apulian architecture that finds no parallel on Attic vases. In the earliest images of this type, the *naiskos* is empty, the deceased is not yet integrated in the architectonic frame.[7] But very soon the relation between *naiskos* and deceased becomes more closely determined. On volute craters produced in the workshop of the *Iliupersis* Painter[8] the figure has moved inside the *naiskos* and is painted in white, the same colour used for the architectonic elements: what we see is no longer a living person, but an artefact, a grave-statue, clearly to be distinguished from the persons surrounding the grave, painted in the usual red-figure technique; the importance of the sepulchral motif is underlined by the fact that it is repeated on the back of the crater in the form of a plain stele. This iconography turned out to be highly successful and quickly became canonical; we know hundreds of Apulian vases of this type.

Let me sum up: sepulchral iconography on Apulian vases starts around 420; for about half a century it remains rather rare and is confined to smaller, comparatively modest vases like *hydriai* and amphorae. In the second quarter of the fourth century sepulchral scenes become more frequent and appear for the first time on volute craters, a particularly pretentious and costly shape. This evolution can be explained in two different ways: the rising quantity and quality of sepulchral scenes could indicate a corresponding change in function, more and more vases being used in a sepulchral context; but we could also imagine the ritual as a constant structure, vases being produced for sepulchral purpose from the very beginning, with their iconogra-

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4 The anonymous reader aptly reminded me of one exception, a *hydria* in Athens: *ARV*^{2} 1134, 17.

5 For the following see H. Lohmann, *Grabmäler auf unteritalischen Vasen* (1979), 2-7.

6 Cf. *RVAp* 98,4/237; 139,6/35.

7 *RVAp* 197,8/41.43, Pl.63,1.2.

8 *RVAp* 192,8/1.7.

phy slowly adapting to the given function. In both cases the iconography mirrors the function of the vases, this reflection happening either immediately or (as seems more likely) with a certain delay.

About the actual sepulchral function of the vases we still know very little. Comparatively well known is the necropolis of Tarentum: in the second half of the fifth and the early fourth century we find usually simple fossa-tombs with few or no vases. At this time Tarentine potters seem to have sold their products mainly to rich landowners of the interior. In Tarentum itself larger tombs with rich furnishings make their appearance only towards the middle of the fourth century.[9] Inside the tombs we now find whole sets of *oinochoai* and cups; larger vases (such as craters) were usually left outside the grave, probably functioning as a *sema*.[10] Outside Tarentum, mainly in northern Apulia, on the contrary the richest graves are spacious chamber tombs[11] with enough room to accommodate whole series of larger vases, often with a marked preference for volute craters, the largest specimens reaching over one meter in height. Such series of truly monumental vases must have been put on display before reaching their final destination in the grave, probably on the occasion of a feast; the display of luxury vases is rather frequent in the representation of sepulchral feasts in Etruscan tombs.[12] We might imagine similar feasts also in Apulia.

I have mentioned the wealth and variety of mythological scenes as well as the emergence of a sepulchral iconography on Apulian vases. But it should be stressed that initially mythological images and images of the grave constitute two different subject-lines that do not interfere with each other. In the workshop of the *Iliupersis* Painter, where the *naiskos*-vases seem to have

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9 E. Lippolis, in *Catalogo del Museo Nazionale Archeologico di Taranto* III,1: *Taranto, la necropoli* (1994), 52-54; D. Graepler, *Tonfiguren im Grab. Fundkontexte hellenistischer Terrakotten aus der Nekropole von Tarent* (1997), 43, 105ff., 187.

10 A telling example is the chamber tomb with a large bell crater functioning as a *sema*, found 1981-1982 in Viale Virgilio: G.A. Maruggi, in *Vecchi scavi — nuovi restauri* (Exhibition-Catalogue Tarentum 1991), 64-84; *Catalogo del Museo Nazionale Archeologico di Taranto* III,1: *Taranto, la necropoli* (1994), 97.

11 P.G. Guzzo, 'Lucanians, Brettians and Italic Greeks in the fourth and third century B.C.' in *Crossroads of the Mediterranean. Archaeologia Transatlantica* 2, 1984, 213f., 238-240.

12 L.B. Van der Meer, 'Kylikeia in Etruscan Tomb Painting' in: H.A.G. Brijder (ed.), *Ancient Greek and Related Pottery. Proceedings of the International Vase Symposium*, Amsterdam 1984 (1985), 298-304; cf. S. Steingräber, *Catalogo ragionato della pittura etrusca* (1984), 395f. s.v. Kylikeia.

been invented, sepulchral and mythological iconography are carefully kept distinct. When on the front of a vase we see an image referring to some mythological episode, then on the back we usually find an image of Dionysos and his train,[13] but never the representation of a grave: and vice versa. This rule remains valid until the middle of the fourth century, when we begin to have the first examples of a connection between mythological and sepulchral subjects. The workshop of the Varrese Painter seems to have been the first to produce vases which combine a mythological scene on the front with the representation of a grave on the back.[14] The close association of a mythological and a sepulchral scene on one and the same vase seems to have met with great success among customers: it was largely imitated by other vase-painters and quickly became canonical.[15] I should like to stress the importance of this phenomenon: two topics, up to this time independent from each other, become closely related; such close relation will inevitably have consequences also on the level of meaning.

Usually we have the mythological topic on the obverse and the sepulchral scene on the reverse of the vase. But there are a few types of high narrow vases, such as amphorae, *hydriai* and *loutrophoroi*, where the connection between the two kinds of image is even closer. The decoration consists of two horizontal registers, the upper one dedicated to the episode of a myth, the lower one depicting conventional anonymous figures in a sepulchral context. The first examples again originated in the workshop of the Varrese Painter.[16] On a loutrophoros in New York (Fig. 1),[17] that was produced a few years later in the workshop of the Dareios Painter, the lower register shows a grave-stele; in the upper register we see the imminent death of Hippolytos, whose horses are being frightened by the white bull emerging from the sea. Closely related is a two-register-amphora in Bari,[18] produced in the same workshop: here instead of Hippolytos we find Orpheus crowned by a Nike while he sings in front of Hades. The composition of the two vases is far from fortuitous; it addresses the viewer, inviting him to establish a relation between the two registers. This viewer will inevitably refer the grave scene in the lower register to the death of the person he is actually mourning;

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13 *RVAp* 193, 8/2-4; 6, 8, 17 and passim; cf. *RVAp* Suppl 2, 47, 8/6a.

14 *RVAp* 338, 13/3; 341, 13/22.

15 *RVAp* 403, 15/41-42; 409, 15/68; 466, 17/55; 472, 17/75; 474, 18/1 and passim.

16 Amphora London BM F331: *RVAp* 338, 13/5.

17 Shelby White and Leon Levy Collection: *RVAp* Suppl. 1, 73, 18/20a; D.v. Bothmer (ed.), *Glories of the Past* (1990) 173 Nr. 124.

18 *RVAp* 523, 18/225: Perrone Collection; *Atti del 14. Convegno di Studi sulla Magna Grecia*, 1974, Pl. 5; *LIMC* 7, 84 s.v. Orpheus Nr. 21*.

Figure 1

the vertical correspondence between this grave and the mythological episode above it invites him to connect the mythological event and his own present. I am not arguing here that the vase functions as the vehicle for a precise eschatological meaning. I merely suggest that the vase summons the viewer to use the myth as a mirror in order to reflect the present case of death: as a mirror, or — if I may use a rhetorical conception — as an allegory, because this is exactly what allegory means: the myth is related to something else, to an external reality, and to a reality which is of urgent importance for the viewer.

Narrative versus allegorical meaning

I apologise for the detour: at last we reach the two concepts I set out to illustrate. On Attic symposion-vases myths are represented (so I would assume) for their own sake, that is, for the sake of cultivated entertainment on the occasion of convivial wine-drinking. In Apulia the myths become connected with sepulchral scenes, the two iconographies are brought to face each other; and this face-to-face meeting gives the mythological scenes a new level of meaning. From this moment on we have, I think, to distinguish two levels, two different kinds of meaning: narrative and allegorical. The narrative meaning takes the mythological scene by itself, tells you the story, explaining what you see: it tells you who Hippolytos is and who is responsible for the bull that is going to cause death and destruction. Hippolytos has but a few more moments to live, and he turns around to look at his own fate. For the details of the story we need only refer to the Euripidean tragedy. In the case of Orpheus the matter is slightly more complicated: our main source for the story is much later than the vase we are looking at;[19] we do not know very well what kind of Orpheus-stories were

19 Vergil, *Georg.* 4, 453ff.

circulating around the middle of the fourth century; the only thing we know for sure is that Orpheus was thought of as being one of the very few humans who, while still alive, managed to find their way into the underworld and out again. Thus far the narrative meaning.

Now the allegorical meaning, which seeks to draw a connection between the myth and the actual present, using the myth as a mirror. This can happen in many different ways; let me just point out two possibilities, which are opposite and complementary, the first one optimistic, the second one pessimistic. An optimistic allegory will look for a myth likely to give shape to some kind of hope for a good future beyond death: witness Orpheus, who succeeds in bringing the charm of his song right into the heart of darkness, winning victory from no less than Hades himself. A pessimistic allegory on the contrary will be apt to look for comfort just in the darkest aspects of myth: are not the most terrible stories particularly fitting to teach us how to mitigate our own sorrow? For this we even have a technical term in Greek ethical philosophy: *metriopatheia*.[20] In plain words: bitter is our grief for the

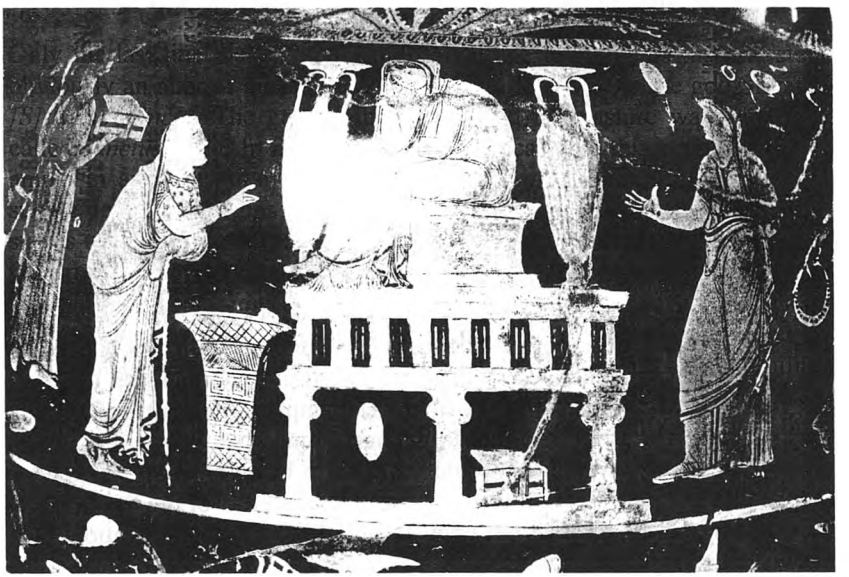

Figure 2

20 Plutarch, *Cons. ad Apollonium* 2, 1020; Diog. Laert. 5,31; cf. I.M. Nachov, 'Katharsis und Consolatio', in: H. Kuch (ed.), *Die griechische Tragödie in ihrer gesellschaftlichen Funktion* (1983), 198.

deceased, but how much more terrible was the fate of Hippolytos, whose death was caused by his own father.

If we go on to enquire about narrative and allegorical meaning, three points are worth stressing. First, the composition of the New York loutrophoros and the Bari amphora makes clear that the mythological picture functions as an allegorical similitude for an actual case of death; the interest in the death of Hippolytos and in Orpheus singing in front of Hades is — last but not least — of allegorical nature. I would suggest that this is valid for Apulian mythological vase-painting in general: mythological vases were produced for display at a sepulchral feast, and the scenes of myth were generally intended to be given an allegorical meaning in a sepulchral context. Nevertheless the stress laid on the allegorical function of myth can vary from vase to vase. As an example I would like to cite two amphorae, both attributed to the Varrese Painter, one in Tarentum (Fig. 2)[21] and one in Bonn (Fig. 3).[22] On the amphora in Tarentum we see Niobe sitting on a construction which is most likely to be interpreted as the tomb of her children; in front of her is an old man addressing her, but Niobe, completely lost in her grief, does not react. The image corresponds to a narrative situation well known from an Aeschylean tragedy:[23] after the death of her children, Niobe remains seated on their tomb for days, without speaking, without moving; every attempt to convince her to put an end to her mourning fails; her grief is past consolation; at the end the gods, in order to relieve her sorrow, turn her into stone. Exactly this transformation is what we see on the amphora in Bonn: Niobe is standing inside a *naiskos*, in an attitude of grief; from her shins downward she is white: she is just on the point of being changed into stone. The two vases follow very different strategies, even though both seem to be perfectly compatible within one and the same workshop. The amphora in Tarentum puts the accent on the dramatic confrontation between Niobe and her own father, who fails to convince her to return to normal life: the main interest lies in the narrative of the myth. The amphora in Bonn on the contrary reduces the narrative elements to a minimum: what we see is a normal grave-*naiskos*; and everybody would take this to be an anonymous, generic scene, if it were not for two details: the attitude of sorrow of the figure inside the *naiskos* and the discreet but unmistakable hint at her petrification: both make clear that we are looking at a mythological scene. Nevertheless, the

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21 Taranto, Museo Nazionale Archeologico, 8935: *RVAp* 338, 23/4; *LIMC* 6, 910 s.v. Niobe Nr. 10*.

22 Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum, 99: *RVAp* 38, 13/3; *LIMC* 6, 910 s.v. Niobe Nr. 16*.

23 S. Radt (ed.), *Aischylos. Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* 3 (1985), 265-80.

Figure 3

narrative meaning has become of little importance: we are not even able to define properly the narrative function of the *naiskos*: is it still the tomb of Niobe's children, as on the amphora in Tarentum? Or is it the tomb of Niobe herself, who is about to become her own grave-statue?[24] The image does not allow us to answer such a question, which indicates that the question is not pertinent any more. The *naiskos* has less a narrative than an allegorical function: it refers to the sepulchral occasion for which the vase was purchased. The Bonn amphora goes particularly far in blurring the narrative meaning in favour of the allegorical. The amphora in Tarentum does exactly the opposite: it offers a surplus of narrative substance that goes far beyond any allegorical application: such an image does not want to be used only as an allegorical mirror, it also wants to tell a story. Exactly the same parallelism of allegorical and narrative meaning is found in funerary speeches: the orator who refers to a mythological episode pays obeisance to an allegorical interest, but he also wants to entertain and to distract his public; and there is no better way to achieve this than to tell a good story.

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24 See Chr. Aellen, in: *Le peintre de Darius et son milieu* (Exhibition-Catalogue Geneva 1986), 153.

The second point I would like to stress concerns one fundamental difference between narrative and allegorical meaning. Narrative meaning is (if I may say so) ready made: the story has been told many times, and the viewer has to know it; he is asked to tell it again, but not to produce a new and independent version. Allegorical meaning on the contrary has to be produced on a case by case basis, by a specific viewer under specific circumstances — and different circumstances may possibly require different kinds of allegorization. In the context of the death of a girl, for example, the allegorical meaning of a Niobe vase could be put in words as follows: bitter is the grief for a young woman who died before marriage; but how much more terrible was the fate of Niobe, who reached maturity only to witness the death of all 14 of her children. In the context of the death of an older woman the allegorical meaning of the same vase would obviously need to be modified, putting the accent on the blessings of fertility and on the children surviving their mother as an argument of consolation. All this may appear slightly trivial; but I would suggest that triviality is a frequent, perhaps even a necessary characteristic of allegorical meaning, if such a meaning is to be provided by

Figure 4

the viewer. Quite an amount of scholarly energy has been spent in trying to make out the ultimate eschatological meaning of Apulian vase painting: with dubious results, I think, because an ultimate meaning, conceived as the secret solution of a riddle, simply does not exist. Every mythological image allows not one allegorical meaning, but a whole spectrum of such meanings: a good image is supposed to make the production of allegorical meaning easy for the viewer, not to put difficulties in his way; meaning that is easy to produce tends inevitably to be simple. If we inquire into allegorical meanings, therefore, an overdose of hermeneutical refinement may be of very little help.

This leads to my third point: more rewarding, from a scientific point of view, is an investigation of the narrative strategies of the vase-paintings. Their narrative meaning is, as I have said, ready made: the vases, being mute, do not tell their stories by themselves; they presuppose a given story that is already there; the telling of the story is a matter of speech; before being put into images, stories are told in words, in spoken or written texts. Every narrative image enters a relation with and makes itself dependent on a text (or on an external storyteller). This relationship between images and texts can assume very different forms; it makes a big difference, I would argue, whether the image on the vase is related to a story once heard, or to a written text that one can read. This is what I should like now to examine in the second part of this paper.

Orestes in Delphi

I shall deal here with representations of only a single mythical episode. Orestes, after having murdered his mother Klytaimnestra in order to avenge his father Agamemnon, is pursued by the Furies and seeks protection from Apollo in Delphi. I have chosen this particular subject first because it was represented in Athens as well as in Apulia, and with interesting differences; secondly because the iconography is closely related to a literary text, and we shall see how the impact of a text can entail very different consequences, with the images pursuing divergent strategies of narration.

My main concern here is Apulian iconography, but let me nevertheless start with some Attic vases depicting our subject.[25] There are not very many of them; they are all chronologically close to each other and their iconog-

25 A.J.N.W. Prag, *The Oresteia* (1985), 48-50; R. Padel, *In and Out of the Mind. Greek Images of the Tragic Self* (1992), 179ff.; D. Knoepfler, *Les imagiers de l'orestie. Mille ans d'art antique autour d'un mythe grec* (Exhibition-Catalogue Neuchâtel 1991-92).

Figure 5

raphy is fairly uniform, as shown by a *hydria* in Berlin (Fig. 4)[26] and a column crater in San Antonio (Fig. 5):[27] we see Orestes pursued by two Furies (they are usually winged; the Berlin *hydria*, where they are wingless, is an exception); Orestes is fleeing, with one knee on a heap of stones which must represent a primitive kind of altar; behind the altar we see Apollo, at his side his sister Artemis (in Berlin with a bow, in San Antonio with a torch). In his right hand Orestes holds the sword: it is the weapon he slew his mother with; he does not even try to use it against the Furies, who are threatening him with snakes: these beings are not human, and against them human weapons are of no help.

Looking at these images one immediately thinks of Aischylos' *Oresteia*: the trilogy was produced in 458, and the last of the three tragedies (*Eumenides*) deals with the Erinyes pursuing Orestes, who finds temporary refuge in Delphi; from there he flees to Athens, where he is finally acquitted. In Attic vase painting there is no representation of Orestes in Delphi before 458: the Berlin *hydria* can be dated in the 450s, the other vases between 450 and 440. The chronological coincidence is striking, the influence of the tragedy fairly evident. But one should not force the correspondence between vase-paintings and drama too much: for instance Artemis has no role whatsoever in the tragedy, and there is no one scene which would really corre-

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26 Berlin, Antikensammlung SMPK, F 2380: *ARV*^{2} 1121,16.

27 San Antonio Museum of Art, 86.134.73: *ARV*^{2} 1097, 21 bis; *Paral* 450, 21; Prag, *Oresteia* Taf. 32a; H.A. Shapiro, *Myth into Art* (1994), 145 fig. 102; H.A. Shapiro, C.A. Picon and G.D. Scott (edd.), *Greek Vases in the San Antonio Museum of Art* (1995), 174ff. no. 88.

spond to what is represented on the vases: as the tragedy begins, Orestes is already in Delphi; the Furies, exhausted by the pursuit, are sleeping; when they wake up, Orestes is already gone, on his way to Athens. The vase-painters therefore did not represent one particular scene of the drama: what they had in mind was rather the story as a whole, even if in rudimentary form. For this story they chose the iconographic formula of a pursuit: such a pursuit makes it immediately clear that the Furies are superhuman, highly dangerous beings: the hero, even though courageous and armed, has no means to defend himself from their attack, he can only flee. But the images also show that this flight has just come to an end: Orestes has put himself under the protection of a mighty god, who confronts the Furies with an untroubled attitude: we might presume that he will finally parry their attack. Altogether the dependence of the vase-paintings on the tragedy does not go very far: what the painters took over is no more than the story as it could be summarized in one or two sentences. This narrative essence is transformed into an iconographic scheme that is clearly arranged and operates with simple contrasts. The images are generated in a horizon that is far remote from the literary work; the influence of Aischylos' drama on the iconography is, after all, modest.

The distance between vase painting and drama becomes even more evident if (before turning from Athens to Apulia) we take one closer look at the beginning of the *Eumenides*: for the tragedy begins in a very surprising way. The difference between what Aischylos put on stage and the vase-paintings could hardly be more extreme. The vases underline the dynamics of flight and pursuit; they show the Furies winged and rushing along swiftly. Completely different is their entrance in the drama; but is it really an entrance at all? The spectator sees the Furies for the first time when the door of the temple opens, and what he sees are motionless, sleeping creatures. This is not, I think, what one would actually expect: sleeping demons? Is it not their job to chase Orestes without respite, to drive him to frenzy and despair? But if so: why are they sleeping? What is the point of putting sleeping Furies on stage?

To answer this question one has to grasp the concrete dramaturgical problem connected with the appearance of the Erinyes. The whole drama would lose much of its effect if the Erinyes, who at the end will be appeased and tamed, did not from the very beginning appear as a mortal danger: they must represent sheer horror. An anecdote seems to imply that exactly in this respect Aischylos has been perfectly successful: at the first performance of the tragedy the very sight of the Erinyes was so frightening, so it is said, that

Figure 6

pregnant women were delivered of stillborn children.[28] But what is so frightening about the sight of sleeping Furies? After all one would imagine that even Erinyes are less frightening asleep than awake — just as they are depicted on the vases. What the vases show is a pursuit of breathtaking speed. But such a speed as this could hardly be accomplished on stage. The tragic drama of the time seems to have been a rather static genre, forbidding all too rapid movements. The conventions of the genre made it necessary to reduce speed to a minimum. But how can slow motion give rise to horror? In order to solve this problem Aischylos does not confront his audience with the Erinyes directly: first he lets the spectators see what effect the Erinyes have. Nowadays every horror movie uses this kind of trick, showing first not the monster, but the panic-stricken eyes of the victim; and the effect is stronger if we do not yet know what the victim is looking at; as far as we can tell, Aischylos seems to have invented precisely this kind of procedure.

The tragedy begins with the priestess at prayer in front of the temple of Apollo in Delphi, the door of which is shut (Fig. 6): the verses are calm and solemn, to be spoken in calm and solemn attitude. After the prayer the priestess enters the temple and the stage remains empty: an effect no

28 *Aisch. Vita* 9; cf. S. Melchinger, *Das Theater der Tragödie* (1974), 9.

dramatist had ever used before, so far as we can tell. When the priestess enters the scene again, she seems not to be the same person any longer; something absolutely dreadful has happened to her, so dreadful that she can no longer even stand on her feet (Fig. 7). 'Horrible: Horrors to relate, horrors for my eyes to behold, have sent me back from the house of Loxias so that I have no strength left in me nor can I go upright. I run with hand's help, not with my legs'.[29] Then she describes what she has seen: a man smeared with blood, seeking refuge at the omphalos, and all around him a company of sleeping creatures; women, she calls them first. 'No, women they were surely not; Gorgons I rather call them. Nor yet can I liken them to forms of Gorgons either'. Then she calls them Harpies (whom she has once seen in a picture): 'Only these had no wings that could be seen; they are black and altogether detestable. From their eyes oozes a loathly rheum, and they snore with breath that drives one back. [...] But for the outcome, let that be now the care of the lord of this house, Loxias himself'.

Figure 7

With these words she departs. Only now does the door of the temple open and the spectators see the Furies asleep. It is not a peaceful sleep: the demons snore, as we have just heard. But of course it is not this that makes up the horror of the scene. The horror results from witnessing the change

29 *Eumenides* 34ff. (trans. Richmond Lattimore).

that has occurred in the priestess. Now this priestess is basically a most dignified and imperturbable person, perfectly accustomed to supernatural appearances (as long as they are, so to speak, ordinary supernatural appearances). What has made such an impact on her must be something unspeakably horrible. Thus sheer horror is aroused by the Erinyes even *before* they are seen; they are utterly frightful even when they are in a state of comparative harmlessness, sleeping; as soon as they come to themselves and awake, the horror can only increase. To show them sleeping is a most effective way to initiate a crescendo of suspense and horror.

Now let us move from the fifth century to the fourth, and from Athens to Tarentum. In Apulia the vases representing our subject are rather numerous.[30] From their iconography they can be divided in two distinct groups. The first group shows a scene of pursuit which follows closely the Attic tradition (with a minor but significant difference: the Furies have no wings; the Apulian painters seem to follow Aischylos' instructions more closely than their Attic colleagues). Far more interesting and completely different is the second group, represented here by a bell crater in Paris (Fig. 8)[31] and a calyx crater in St. Petersburg (Fig. 9).[32] On the Paris crater Orestes is no longer fleeing: he is sitting on the

Figure 8

30 A. Kossatz, *Dramen des Aischylos auf westgriechischen Vasen* (1978) 102ff.; *LIMC* 7, 72-74 s.v. Orestes Nr. 12-34, 48f., 51-53 (H. Sarian).

31 Louvre, Dépt. Antiquités Grecques, Cp 710: *RVAP* 97, 4/229; Shapiro, *Myth into Art*, 147 fig. 104.

32 Ermitage, B1743 (St. 349): Ch. Aellen, *A la recherche de l'ordre cosmique* (1994) 28, G1, Pl. 23.

Figure 9

altar in the classical attitude of a suppliant; behind the altar we can clearly see the Delphic omphalos. The correspondence with Aischylos' drama seems to be much closer than in the case of the Attic vase paintings. We remember the words of the priestess: 'I see a man postured in the suppliant's seat with blood dripping from his hands and from a newly drawn sword'. Next to the hero stands Apollo, holding out a piglet, letting its blood flow over Orestes. In the tragedy Orestes will later tell Athena that he has been purified with the blood of a newborn piglet: just as the ritual demands.[33] To the left we see the sleeping Erinyes, with the ghost of Klytaimnestra trying to awaken them: and this too corresponds exactly to a scene of the tragedy. The slightly later crater in St. Petersburg shows the moment before the arrival of Apollo: Orestes is sitting on an altar inside a *naiskos*, embracing the omphalos; at his feet lie the sleeping Furies: they are painted in black, according to Aischylos' description, and therefore not easy to see against the black background of the vase; at the right the terrified priestess is stealing away.

These painters evidently have a completely different approach from the Attic painters: instead of aiming at the story as a whole, they follow the drama closely, offering a literal reflex of one particular scene. The identification of the scene is easy, we need only consult the text: between lines 63 and 64 the priestess leaves and Apollo enters the scene; while he talks to Orestes the Furies remain asleep; only after Orestes leaves (line 93) does the spirit of Klytaimnestra appear and finally succeed in awakening the Erinyes. This close proximity between image and text is a new phenomenon that

33 *Eum.* 281-83, 235-38, 445-47; O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aischylos* (1977), 381-83; R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford 1983), 370-74, 386f; A.H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylos Eumenides* (Cambridge 1989), 124f.; A.J. Podlecki, *Aeschylos Eumenides* (Warminster 1989), 153f.

finds no parallel in Attic vase painting of the sixth and fifth centuries. This change is only to be understood in a broader frame: it is, I would suggest, directly related to the emergence of written texts in the late fifth and early fourth century.

This seems to have been one of the most fundamental changes in Greek culture. In Greece the stories of myth had always been transmitted by poetical texts; these texts were produced in written form, but exactly when this began has long been a matter of dispute, for which this is not the place; what matters in our present context is that poetical texts — down to the tragedies of the fifth century — were intended not for reading, but exclusively for declamation. The Attic vase painters lived in a world in which there were no written texts, or, to put it more precisely, in which the medium of writing had no relevance for the *reception* of poetry. Around the beginning of the fourth century the situation begins to change: the quantity of manuscripts in circulation increases, and not much later we find the first texts addressing themselves no longer to an assembly of hearers, but to a public of readers.

This well-known change had its impact last but not least on the level of image-production. The Attic vase painters had to rely on what they remembered: the easiest thing to remember is the main plot of a story, while the exact wording is quickly forgotten. Even though influenced by the plot of Aischylean tragedy, the Attic Orestes images have very little to do with the full text of the *Eumenides* and the complexity of the whole drama; what the painters relied on was a simple summary, what I would like to call a *hearer's digest*: something easy to understand and to remember. One consequence is that the images also are easy to decipher: they do not require any particular amount of competence in the viewer; it is perfectly sufficient if he has only an approximate idea of what the whole story is about. This is a general feature of Attic iconography of the sixth and fifth centuries: it is easy to read; you do not need to have a deep knowledge of Greek literature in order to identify the narrative meaning of Attic vases; consequently there are only very few images whose interpretation is controversial.

Moving from the fifth to the fourth century and from Attica to Southern Italy the situation changes: now we find more and more images that rely closely on a particular text: exactly like the images that show Orestes at the altar in the midst of the sleeping Furies. A particularly telling example of correspondence with a given text is offered by the image of Orestes being purified. These are the words of Orestes in the drama: 'the blood is slumbering now and fading', he says after arriving in Athens; 'the pollution wrought by my mother's slaying is washed away; for while yet fresh it was expelled at the hearth of the god, Phoebus, by purification of slaughtered

swine';[34] and a little later, now speaking directly to Athena, he adds: 'It is the law that he who is defiled by shedding blood shall be debarred all speech until the blood of a suckling victim shall have besprinkled him by the ministrations of one empowered to purify from murder. Long since, at other houses, have I been thus purified both by victims and by flowing streams'.[35] The agreement between image and text could hardly be more perfect. But just this perfect agreement results in a picture that is far more difficult to understand than the Attic vases depicting Orestes and the Erinyes. We understand the Apulian images only because we know the text: had we not the text, we should be at a loss, and the interpretation of the vases would turn out to be highly problematic. Exactly this seems to be the case with many Apulian vases whose interpretation remains obscure: we are unable to determine their narrative meaning, because it refers to a text we do not know any longer; and not knowing the text, we lack the only key that would disclose the meaning of the picture. Compared with the iconography of the sixth and fifth centuries, this is a completely new phenomenon.

Summing up, I would suggest that the emergence of a new culture of writing and reading had far-reaching consequences for both the quantity and the quality of the images. One evident and important consequence of the circulation of written texts is that it reduces the rate of forgetting: more and more texts are being conserved, and their quantity increases in time. Probably this proliferation of texts is a necessary precondition for the wealth and variety of mythological iconography on Apulian vases of the fourth century. But the existence of written texts produces consequences not only on the level of quantity: the quality of the images changes as well. We now have images that follow the text very closely and are therefore much more difficult to decipher.

It may seem surprising that I keep speaking about the text; are the Apulian images really dependent on texts? Is there not another, and much more likely possibility? Are they not rather to be understood as a reflection of contemporary theatre production? The images would then be what Trendall and Webster used to call illustrations of Greek drama.[36] Now the very image of the purification gives us the opportunity to test such an assumption — and to falsify it. What the Paris crater shows corresponds exactly to the words I have been quoting. Orestes mentions the purification as having happened at the hearth of Apollo: but when exactly, and on what occasion? If we look for

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34 *Eum.* 282-83.

35 *Eum.* 448-452.

36 A.D. Trendall and T.B.L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (1971).

a scene in the drama in which such a purification could possibly have taken place,[37] there is only one possibility: it is the scene when Apollo comes to meet Orestes immediately after the departure of the priestess, and before Orestes himself leaves Delphi for Athens. Now in the brief dialogue between Apollo and Orestes there is no spoken trace whatsoever of such a ritual being performed. We should therefore have to imagine the purification as a *scena muta*, a scene without words: such a scene would seem to contradict one of the central rules of Greek tragedy, where there should always be agreement between words and action, and where important action is always spoken action. In our specific case we should have to imagine Apollo pouring blood over Orestes without uttering one single word, and Orestes letting it happen without reacting, and of course without thanking the god for doing him such a service: he will mention it only about two hundred lines later. All this seems hardly credible. There are, I would think, only two possible solutions. Either we have to assume the text to be corrupt, i.e. a lacuna in the dialogue between Apollo and Orestes. But there is no reason to assume such a lacuna besides the fact that there is no reference to a purification ritual being performed: the argument is obviously circular. If we want to avoid such a circle, there is only one conclusion to be drawn: in the *Eumenides* the purification of Orestes was never shown on stage.

Aischylos had, by the way, very good reasons only to mention the purification, without showing it: the performance of the ritual on stage would inevitably have produced a climax, and this climax would have made much less plausible the continuation of the drama. It would have been very difficult to understand why Orestes, even though purified through a ritual performed by the highest authority, the god himself, was obliged to flee again, seeking his ultimate salvation in Athens. In order to avoid such problems the best thing to do was to play down the importance of the purification ritual, and that meant mentioning it, without having it performed.[38]

The consequence of all this is that whoever invented the iconography of Orestes' purification did not rely on something he had seen at the theatre, but relied on what he had been *reading*: we have no idea whether he actually ever saw a production of the play; but we can be sure that he had read the text (and, by the way, he read it very carefully, taking into account both passages I have been quoting: the first tells us about the sacrifice of a swine;

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37 For a full discussion of the problem and its possible solution see R.R. Dyer, 'Evidence for Apolline Purification Rituals', *JHS* 89, 1969, 38ff., particularly 39.

38 See the suggestion by T.B.L. Webster, quoted by Dyer, l.c. 39, n. 5.

the second does not repeat the species, but adds further specifications about sprinkling the blood of a suckling victim).

This seems to be of general importance. It goes against an old and venerable commonplace in studies about Apulian vase painting. A lot has been written about the people in Tarentum having a true passion for theatre and about the influence of the theatre on the iconography of Apulian vase-painting. Quite a bit of all this is, I think, truly mistaken. Of course there are lots of scenes referring to theatre: but these are always comic scenes.[39] The character of serious mythological iconography is completely different: these images *never* (in Apulian vase painting there is not one exception to this rule) contain any element that would refer to the dramaturgic reality of theatre production: no costumes, no masks, no stage. Of course very often the story represented corresponds to the plot of a tragedy: vase painters often fell back on the narrative substance of tragedies, using them as a quarry for mythological themes; but what they were interested in were the myths as transmitted by the texts, and not the production of theatre.

On one side the written texts provided an almost inexhaustible quarry for themes and motives. On the other they also turned out to represent a certain danger for the independence of iconography. Let us look again at the representation of the Erinyes. In Athens (Fig. 4-5) the painters show them as supernatural beings, quick-moving and dangerous; in order to stress their supernatural status as well as the rapidity of their movement they usually gave them wings, in explicit contrast to the *Oresteia* production, where the Erinyes had no wings: the painters had no reason to bring the outfit of their Furies into line with the stage directions of Aischylos. Completely different is the behaviour of the Apulian painters. The painter of the St. Petersburg calyx crater (Fig. 9) did not even try to represent the danger of the Furies with his own iconographic means; he simply kept to the text. But on the dramatic stage and in vase-painting the effectiveness of the same element is not the same. On stage, as we have seen, the sleep of the Erinyes and the delay with which they finally awake had been used as a means of achieving a determined end. The appearance of the sleeping Furies had been preceded

39 The best book on the subject is *not* by an archaeologist: O. Taplin, *Comic Angels. Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Painting* (1993). There is only one point where I would disagree. Taplin attempts to connect some comic Apulian vases with particular scenes from comedies by Aristophanes — in my view, without success. I would maintain that no comic scene in Apulian iconography shows a demonstrable relation to a given Attic comedy.

by a sequence which put the audience in a state of suspense and expectation of horror. When the painter takes the sleeping demons out of this sequence, using them as an isolated motif, they inevitably lose their effect: the danger emanating from them can no longer be seen; the viewer has to *know* about it. The primacy of the text has robbed the images of a good deal of their own narrative possibilities. In the worst case this might result in an image that has become completely unintelligible without a text, and at the same time an image in which the viewer finds no more than what he has already been reading.

Let me close with one last reflection. The images of sleeping Furies might be considered as not very satisfactory from a narrative point of view; but what if we consider them from the point of view of funerary allegory? In Apulian vase painting Orestes is rarely represented as killing Aigisthos or Klytaimnestra: much more often the images show him in Delphi, clinging to the omphalos, seeking the protection of Apollo — in a situation, that is, where apparently the Furies were unable to harm him. The Apulian vase painters' special liking for this episode was probably motivated by allegorical interests. For the Apulian viewer, the Furies were inhabitants of the underworld; we find them again in representations of the reign of Hades, where their function is to guard and/or to torment the spirits of the dead. These Furies are terrible demons, but (this seems to be *one* plausible allegorical meaning of the story) sometimes even they can be put to sleep; and there are some gods who are able to give men lasting protection defending them against the attacks of the Furies, in this life — and perhaps even after death.

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Fig. 1: Loutrophoros New York, The Shelby White and Leon Levy Collection: SL 1990.1.124; Photograph.

Fig. 2: Amphora Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum: 99.

Fig. 3: Amphora Tarentum, Museo Nazionale Archeologico: 8935; Phot. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rome.

Fig. 4: *Hydria* Berlin, Antikensammlung SMPK: F 2380; Phot. Jutta Tietz-Glagow.

Fig. 5: Column crater San Antonio Museum of Art: 86.134.73.

Fig. 6-7: First scene of Aischylos' *Eumenides*; production by Peter Stein, Berlin Schaubühne 1980; Phot. Ruth Walz.

Fig. 8: Bell crater Paris, Louvre, Dépt. Ant. Grecques: Cp 710; Phot. P. Lebaube.

Fig. 9: Calyx crater, St. Petersburg, Ermitage, B 1743.