

EYMOYΣΙΑ

CERAMIC AND ICONOGRAPHIC STUDIES
IN HONOUR OF
ALEXANDER CAMBITOGLOU

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FROM TARENTUM TO TROY AND ON TO TUNISIA:
HOMERIC SURVIVALS IN THE HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN WORLDS

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No tribute to Alexander Cambitoglou can really begin without reference to the world of Magna Graecia in the late 5th to early 3rd centuries BC, a realm which he, like his mentor in Australia Arthur Dale Trendall, has done so much to make more understandable in the visual history of later Hellenic civilization. Since so many of the mythological vases which Professor Cambitoglou has studied and published are related to Homeric epics, it seems fitting to begin with an example of the limestone sculpture of Tarentum, about 300 BC, in which a moment from the battle between the Greeks and the Amazons is portrayed after a famous prototype. This unusual vignette of Homeric mythology in Greek Italy leads us to Asia Minor at the height of the Roman Empire where a totally different view of Homer and the monuments emerges. The road then turns back from Southern Italy across Sicily to Tunisia, where the prosperous agrarian world of Constantine the Great and his successors produced a new, humanistic view of Homer, one tempered by the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

THE MONUMENTS

The section of pedimental relief illustrated on pl. 51: 1 is probably from the façade of a very small tomb or a little shrine.¹ The principal figure, lying outstretched in a rocky landscape with her arm flung over her head would appear to be an Amazon, on the evidence of her Phrygian or north-eastern barbarian costume. Her pose in death is that of sleep. The bare left leg of a man, possibly a kneeling Greek, is at the left.

A similar Amazon, in roughly mirror-reversal, and a Greek in a position like that postulated for the owner of the leg seen here, appear near the bottom of the Strangford Shield in the British Museum, in a composition comprising a major portion of the exterior enrichment in relief on the shield of a small marble version of the Athena Parthenos. In the clean-cut yet expressive terms of Greek art in the lower back leg, foot, and heel of the 'boot' of Italy, this composition formed part of a small Tarentine pediment and apparently presented an Amazonomachy. The completed scene was yet one more reflection, well over a century later and beyond the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, of the influences of the Phidian masterpiece in the temple of Athena on the Acropolis of Athens in the arts of Greater Greece.

In a way the Amazon of the Tarentine pediment is among the last of the truly poetic representations of Homer in ancient art, at least until we come to the African red-ware plates of the Constantinian period and later in the 4th cent. AD. The Roman interlude turned the Homeric tales into episodes from a military history grounded in Hannibal, raised on Mithridates VI Eupator, and matured in the Gallic wars with Vercingetorix

¹ Mus. of Fine Arts, Boston, 1985. 343; Limestone relief from Tarentum; 12.9 x 21.6 x 4.2 cm. The Museum Year: 1984-1985, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1985) 27 fig. 48; Sculpture in Stone and Bronze in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Additions to the Collections of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Art, 1971-1988 (1988) 26 no. 14 (S 112).

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and the ill-fated Germanic adventure of Publius Quinctilius Varus in the *saltus Teutoburgiensis*.

Even the imagined features of Homer himself lost their noble 5th-cent. BC or their heroic Alexandrine qualities in the art of the Greek imperial world around the year 200 of the Christian era. The draped bust of Homer on the reverse of a bronze coin of Commodus Caesar, AD 175–177, struck at Nicaea in Bithynia, has turned the bard into a battered old philosopher looking like one of the miracle men and magicians who wandered from city to city in Asia Minor at the height of the Roman Empire, making speeches, providing cures, or showing off exotic animals and reptiles (pl. 51: 2).² It was as if the songs and writings of Homer and his followers had become mixed up with the world of festivals, side-shows, and tough professional athletics which was so much a part of urban life from Macedonia to Syria in the ages of the Antonines, the Severans, and the purely military emperors of the 3rd cent. AD.

The harshness of the Homeric world, as visualized at a low point in Roman imperial history, can be summed up on the reverse of a bronze coin of the island of Samos in the reign of the emperor Gallienus, AD 253–267. Within the city's name in large, Romano-Greek letters, a determined and very muscular Achilles stabs downwards in the neck of the Amazon queen Penthesilea, who falls screaming with her arms outstretched at the Greek hero's feet (pl. 51: 3).³ There is no last moment of love and tenderness, as on the interior of the famous Attic red-figure cup by the Penthesilea Painter in Munich. Certainly the Amazonian battle scenes, with Achilles and Penthesilea in their midsts, on Roman sarcophagi are, at best, reflections of Hellenistic warfare, at their most pedestrian, vignettes from the wars between Trajan's legionaries and the Dacians or the Parthians.

By contrast, a vignette from one of the large Tunisian red-ware trays with the life of Achilles around the rim gives a childlike idyll from the childhood of Achilles, expressed in the terms of an Eros sarcophagus of the 2nd cent. AD. A childlike Chiron half-sits to the right and instructs the plump little Achilles in scholarly and musical disciplines or in the ways of the fields and forests, probably the latter since the wise 'old' Centaur's quiver can be seen hanging on a tree at the left (pl. 51: 5).⁴ The narration is continuous, for the rump and cloak of Chiron are visible at the right as he takes the son of Peleus and Thetis on his next educational experience, on the basis of more complete trays, seemingly classroom instruction. The little rosettes which fill the scene between the architectural, fillet mouldings are the last remembrance of such decorations on the vases of Southern Italy in the 4th cent. BC.

² Mus. of Fine Arts, Boston 1986.72; bronze, diam. 1.7 cm.

From the Edward J. Waddell, Bethesda, Maryland, Auction 1, New York, December 9, 1982, 10 no. 108, enlargement pl. 37; Waddell, List 13, 1985, no. 57; List 21, 1985, no. 110. This and the coin illustrated on pl. 51: 3 are unique.

³ Mus. of Fine Arts, Boston, 1984.257; bronze, diam. 3.3 cm.

From the R. Cyril Lockett Collection, Glendining Sale, London, Part 12, February 23, 1961, 90 no. 2895 pl. 29.

⁴ Fr. in the Sir Charles Nuffler Collection, Boston; 7.5 x 12.5 cm.

Acquired from Edward J. Waddell, Ltd. List 24,

Summer, 1986, 21, 37 no. 370. This scene, in its context of the childhood of Achilles, is shown on the rim of roughly one third of a tray surviving in Berlin; the vignettes run from the birth of Achilles to just beyond the classroom-of-Chiron scene. See J. W. Salomonson, BABesch 44, 1969, 10 fig. 9. The scenes of the Life of Achilles on the rim and in the central medallion of the great silver plate found at Kaiseraugst take his story as far as the hero's unmasking among the daughters of Lycomedes on the island of Skyros: H. A. Cahn-A. Kaufmann-Heinimann (eds.), *Der spätrömische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst, Basler Beiträge zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte* 9 (1984) 11 pls. 147–55, with copious parallels, pls. 161–78. See also LIMC I (1981) 158 s.v. Achilleus (Kossatz-Deissmann).

The final contrast between the harsh or heroic and the poetic in the Homeric arts of the Late Roman Empire involve Achilles, his Trojan antagonist Hector, and the latter's mother Hecuba or his wife Andromache. On the reverse of a big bronze coin of Ilium-Ilium-Troia under the same Emperor Gallienus portrayed on the obverse of the coin of Samos, Hector, so labelled in bad late Greek capitals, charges forth in his two-horse chariot, in full battle array (pl. 51: 4).⁵ Such a scene was perfect for the last major coinage of Ilium before the Herulian barbarians came down into Asia Minor and over into mainland Greece to lay waste the sacred cities and sanctuaries of Homeric Greece and Asia Minor alike. No visitor to Troy (an attraction for Roman tourists during the Empire) could doubt, on coming away with such a coin, that Hector had been a warrior to reckon with as he charged forth to defend his native city from the invading fleet and troops of Agamemnon, Menelaus, Nestor, Ajax, and, of course, Achilles.

Finally, as if back to the future, to the world of Greek vase-painting from Attica to Apulia, a fragment from another African red-ware tray shows one of the royal ladies of Troy, Prince Hector's mother or widow, as she leans out over the walls of Troy to implore fierce Achilles not to drag slain Hector's body around the besieged city (pl. 51: 6).⁶ The palace is shown at the left, looking like a pavilion in a Tunisian agrarian, country-estate mosaic of the Theodosian era, and the mature Achilles has literally the face and mane of a lion as he looks back at the gesturing arms and the soulful face of the sorrowing lady. He is rushing past in his chariot, cloak flying, dragging Hector's body behind him, a scene well recorded from the Attic black-figure hydriai of the end of the Archaic period onwards to the illuminated books, metalwork, and ceramics of the Late Roman era. Here, the poetry and the tragedy are summed up in this ceramic reflection of the elegant silverplate of wealthy magistrates and landowners near the end of the classical world.

CONCLUSION

The perceptions of the visual world of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the later centuries of the Roman Empire are different from those of the Greek world from Pisistratus to Pyrrhus. The Roman Empire was a tougher, more urban, more material place, and the view of Homer's epics became one with the vast spaces and divergent cultures of *imperium* from Ireland to India. Only a few Homeric heroes survived beyond

⁵ Mus. of Fine Arts, Boston 61.193. Bronze, diam. 3.7 cm. From the R. Cyril Lockett Collection, Glendining Sale, London, Part 12, 1961, 89 no. 2879 pl. 29; M. B. Comstock, *BMusFA* 65, 1967, 163-4 fig. 4; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *Romans and Barbarians* (1976) 92 no. C 72.

⁶ Fr. in the Sir Charles Nuffler Collection, Boston; 8.3 x 9.7 cm.

Acquired from Edward J. Waddell Ltd.

This scene of the dragging of Hector's body appears in somewhat more elaborate form in two of the architectural relief panels of the so-called *Tensa Capitolina* or sections of a ceremonial triumphal chariot in bronze, found before 1872 near Frosinone in the *provincia di Campagna* and kept for a long time in the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome: H. Stuart Jones (ed.), *A Catalogue of the Ancient Sculptures Preserved in the Municipal Collections of Rome. The Sculptures of the Palazzo dei Conservatori* (1926) 184-7 pls. 72, 74. Priam and Hecuba are on the elaborate, Late Roman walls

and towers of Troy while Achilles rushes past just below them. The cataloguers (E. S. Strong and B. Ashmole) of this famous series of reliefs have noted the iconographic relationships with Alexander the Great as stimulated by the young Roman emperors Caracalla, Elagabalus, Severus Alexander, and Gordianus III in the years from AD 215 to 244. The entire repertory of the dragging of Hector, from Attic black-figured vases to Late Roman marbles, bronzes, and ivories or terracottas is illustrated as nos. 586 to 632 on pls. 110-21 in LIMC I (1981). These illustrations move very nicely from the poetry of Greece to the militancy of Rome and back again to the calm literacy of the Late Antique world. See, generally, for the translation of these Achilles scenes from metalwork or stone-carving and illuminated manuscripts to red-ware ceramics, especially the rectangular trays: J. W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery* (1972) 83-91 form 56; suggested date AD 360-430.

Christianity. Foremost among these appeared Achilles, who was Alexander the Great to some, King David to others, and the universal military hero to all, a prince to be emulated by the sons of Constantine or the children of Theodosius the Great, in the second and last quarters of the 4th cent. AD.

Yet, it was the civilization of the Judaeo-Christian period of the Roman Empire which rediscovered the poetic values of Athens before and after Pericles. Magna Graecia was a major conduit in preserving these Homeric principles into the Middle Ages, and the recognition of these characteristics and changes from the world of the Darius Painter to the end of the Roman Empire in the Latin West is what this short note is all about.



1. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1985.343: pedimental relief from Tarentum, c.300 BC. Fallen Amazon.



2. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1986.72: bronze coin, reign of Commodus Caesar (AD 175-177). Bust of Homer.



3. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1984.257: Samian bronze coin, reign of Gallienus (AD 253-267). Achilles and Penthesilea.



4. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 61.193: bronze coin, reign of Gallienus (AD 253-267). Hector charging in a biga.



5. Boston, Sir Charles Nuffler Collection: Fr. of North African red-ware tray, c. AD 350. Chiron instructing Achilles.



6. Boston, Sir Charles Nuffler Collection: Fr. of North African red-ware tray, c. AD 350. The dragging of Hector.

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