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The Board Game as Μίμησις Ἐρωτική**

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ABSTRACT

The theme of Achilles and Ajax playing a dice game has been at the center of influential scholarly analysis in the past, remaining prolific today. Notwithstanding, this theme still has much to unfold, principally at an interdisciplinary level. For instance, although most scholars agree that such configuration pertains to the conjuncture of tyche, the sayings and the questions asked by pre-socratic thinkers are seldom considered in vase-painting discussions. Furthermore, the articulation between all the figured sides of a vase is rarely under scrutiny. In this paper, I offer a combinatorial analysis encompassing Heraclitus fr. B 51 and 52 DK; Exekias's amphora (Vatican 344) representing the heroes playing a tables game; and the Copenhagen National Museum's kylix (AS-8353) depicting two daimones similarly occupied, between prophylactic eyes. I argue that these materials surface uniformity between them by emerging enigmas that pertain to sameness as alterity. I further claim that while the intertwinement between mankind and the cosmo seems evident as change, loss and inheritance under the action of eros, and tyche, solely the human (imperfect) feelings lead to responsibility.

Keywords: Achilles, Game, Eros, Greek vases

Introduction

Greek figured pots materialize portable channels of theatricality, rhetoric and communication through figurations that emerge philosophical exercises (Figueira 2020). By reshaping myths into everyday situations and circumstances, the depictions rise complex ethical matters for the beholder to think of. In this conjuncture, human emotions and feelings become prominent through the use of an apparently simple and universal language that challenges all assumptions about appearances, by bringing together limit circumstances, human and cosmological, that admit more than one solution, and allow more than one combination. However, the represented circumstances are such that whatever action happens it produces a crucial consequence. Still, the action to take is determinative to the quality of the effect and to the implications it has on the individual and on the collective. For these reasons, the compositions surface metaphysical preoccupations in the form of pictorial enigmas for the beholder to think of and, eventually, apply in social interaction, in individual conduct, in the projection of institutions, and in the understanding of the cosmo. In this regard, heroes are used as static actors of human problems and perspectives. As the figurations show compositions that are readily recognized by the majority of the observers, they mainly surface illusions as the attentive observation will reveal. This pelike¹ shows two musicians, as indicated by the lyre, hanging at the right side and a flute case², hanging high on the left side. The two players, presumably, enjoy a pause from their activities. A similar scene features an old man, whose white hair and beard contrasts with the youth³ of the other man, who is, perhaps an ἀθλητής, *athlete*, as suggested by the headband.

However, in the figurations nothing is quite what it seems to be, thus alluding to the imperfection of the senses and also sending forth the message that the world is perceived in a distorted manner in which assumptions play a significant role. In fact, one salient strategy in the composition of the figurations is distortion and the other is the representation of the transient. The former is mainly communicated through the rhetoric of dislocations and excess which transmit a sense of oddity. For instance the dress code is not adequate to the situation, the characters perform unexpected actions and hold objects that do not fit the circumstances. For this reason, the notion of “costuming a character”, principally to tell misfit. As to the latter, the character and the objects surpass the frame of the scene or are larger than is usual. The other crucial strategy for meaning to emerge is accomplished through the representation of the action at the exact moment when something is not anymore and something other has not yet taken place. These features ignite meaning and open new perspectives, principally for conveying affections that are universal, and, although they are connected to situations, they are in fact, totally free from these and respect the human being, not solely the Greek or the Persian,

¹See New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 68.27.

²I correct here the indication of a horn pipe (Anonymous 2020, 179), according to the notice of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. 68.27, New York City), where this fragmentary *pelike*, affected to the Musée du Louvre (Paris) is deposited.

³See Bruxelles, Musées Royaux 328.

or the Asian. In this respect, the figurations stand beyond time⁴ and ethnic diversity, universally objective and, simultaneously, totally ambiguous. The consequences of this are twofold, either the beholder feels alerted to the inherent fragility of the human condition and is prompted into thinking of solutions to the problems raised by the figuration or, on the contrary, uses it for political ends or for private intentions, such as honouring the dead. Thusly absorbed into the depiction (Fried, 1988), the beholder must rely on their knowledge to access the manifold layers of meaning contained in the pictorial rendition (Panofsky, 1962), which is never quite fully achieved as this is an infinite source.

In view of the precedent considerations, this paper will look at figurations of Achilles and Ajax playing a board game⁵ with the aim of observing how it serves the purpose of referring alterity and of τύχη. For this end, I will demonstrate how history, literature and ancient philosophy imbricate in the pictorial compositions to form an autonomous complex discourse using a commonplace situation. Heraclitus Fr B DK 52 will be discussed in articulation with this theme in order to observe how two distinct media manifest similar impressions that may enlighten each other and connect as apprehensions of a *mimesis erotike*. By this designation I name the homology⁶ with the process resulting from the interaction of operating forces respecting the cosmo and the human being as part of it.

I will start by mentioning historical⁷ aspects, then I will describe the figurations, and this will be followed by observations respecting hermeneutical coherences prompted by the pictorial compositions.

Figure 1. *Achilles (to the right) and Ajax. Basel AntikenMuseum 1921.328*



Source: Courtesy of Basel AntikenMuseum.

⁴The vase was manufactured at a geographical place at a relatively accurate date. In this regard, it is an object created in space and time (Aguiar e Silva 1991, 34). Plato, *Alc.* 1.110e, *Rep.* 487b, Xenophon *Mem.* 3.9.9, etc.: prov., τύχη ἄνω καὶ κάτω τὰ ἀνθρώπεια πεττεύει fortune *gambles* with human affairs, Ph. 2.85.

⁵Other vases depicting this theme are, for instance, the following:

⁶Florence Goyet has demonstrated that the *Iliad* is structured upon homologies (see Florence Goyet. *Penser sans Concepts: Fonction de l'Épopée Guerrière, Iliade, Chanson de Roland, Hôgen et Heiji Monogatari.* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006). The same applies to the figurations examined for this paper.

⁷By the designation historical, I mean circumstances and situations that can be dated and which have been attributed to people living in the period under consideration in their daily life.

The Game and the Throwing of Dice – Historical Contexts

The *Iliad* does not mention the ludic meeting that opposes Achilles and Ajax in a tables game. However, the fact that it implies the roll of dice indicates the theme of *τύχη*, *thyche*, while the opposition of the two heroes suggests the theme of alterity, otherwise replicated by the references to the universe of the god Dionysus, also represented on side B⁸ of many pots, as the one at Basel University (figure 1).

Generally attributed to the painter and potter Exekias, this theme has a strong presence in the bibliography (Boardman 1978; Woodford 2003; Mackay 2010; Moignard 2015; Figueira 2017) where two main theses can be observed. The first sees them as recreations of political and military affairs and the other understands them as metaphors of the human condition (Beazley 1986, 60). This paper considers these two views to be complementary, as they not only do not exclude one another, but they generate coherence together. Supposedly, board games were created by Palamedes with the objective of maintaining the Greeks occupied during the delay at Aulis; however Achilles and Ajax are not placed at a battlefield (Boardman 1978). Nonetheless, this theme is thought to have been created in the VI century, when it is repeatedly depicted. Herodotus⁹ writes that the Lydians living in the kingdom of Atis invented the game during the hunger period. Herodotus also says that such preference could be justified at the light of reports of a presumed distraction from part the Athenian army at 546, who after a meal engaged with a game, whilst the other part slept, thusly easing the way in for the Pisitrian troops, upon the second return of the latter into Athens. Most scholars find this narration acceptable and credible and, therefore, agree that Achilles and Ajax playing a board game could be dated in the VI BC, although others believe that it was invented earlier and Exekias perfected the composition. Both positions are plausible and they do not exclude one another. Additionally, whoever authored this theme is irrelevant for the purposes of this paper, which centers instead on the hermeneutics of the pictorial composition. Still, it could be argued that the depiction created by Exekias does not contemplate Athena, differently from many variations of this theme. In fact, the presence of the goddess might indicate a derivation from a previous drawing, since it would have been unlikely that the goddess of the *polis*, almost omnipresent in vase painting (Shapiro 1994, 155), would have been ignored by Exekias, principally, in the presence of Achilles, whom the daughter of Zeus held in favour.

A further mainstay holding a connection with daily life is narrated by Herodotus (1, 60). After the announcement according to which Pisistratus would be arriving into Athens with the support of the goddess Athena herself, the tyrant presumably entered the *polis* in the company of a fully armed robust woman over six feet tall. Regardless of the veracity of this account, of which Herodotus himself doubts, the fact remains that the tyrant was acclaimed and the woman, possibly someone from a neighbour demo, was held in high esteem.

⁸See Basel, AntikenMuseum 1921.328.

⁹Herodotus 1, 941; 62-63.

Independently of the factfulness of those contents the relevant matter is that they constitute a direct reference concerning the gathering of circumstances that emphasizes the role of τύχη in human affairs. The presence of Athena, a devious goddess, is in accordance with the theme of the game. Indeed, this emerges as one of the most significant and deeper meanings of the pictorial composition of the heroic game meeting, which I will address in the next in the section.

The Game and the Throwing of Dice – Hermeneutical Coherences

I will start by mentioning a scene in the *Odyssey*¹⁰ of Homer that mentions a dice game played by Penelope's suitors. The context defines these men as slayers who use their prey for self comfort and play for solely for self amusement, in a most contrary heroic disposition manner. The word door, θύρα, *thura*, by being employed in articulation with θυμός, *thumos*, indicates the metaphorical sense that stresses the arrogance of such men, ἀγήνωρ, *agenor*, in which case θυμός designates neither the merriment of playing, nor the commitment to play their best game in order to elevate the capacities of each other. Instead, it names ambition. The setting of the game provides the clue for the metaphor in display. Verily, it nominates the principle of live, *thumos*, that opens itself to the doors of dominance and might, θύρα, *thura*, οἱ μὲν ἔπειτα πεσσοῖσι προπάροιθε θυράων_θυμὸν ἔτερπον ἤμενοι ἐν ῥινοῖσι βοῶν, οὓς ἔκτανον αὐτοί, they were *taking their pleasure* at draughts in front of the doors, sitting on the hides of oxen which they themselves had slain, my underlining)¹¹. The metaphorical use of the doors, carries meaning to the *poiesis* of the words. By positioning the male suitors playing a draughts game in front of the doors of the palace, the mention to the oxen reveals the intensity of the metaphor. Indeed, the men are being compared to oxen fighting for territory occupation, while the πεσσος, *pessos*, signals the strategy for defeating the opponent. The context for this scene supports this analysis. The goddess Athena introduces herself in the palace not before sending Hermes to Ogygia to make the nymph acquainted with the gods deliberation to have Odysseus returned to his home. More importantly, the messenger god is named by the epithet Ἀργειφόντης, *Argeiphontes*, slayer of Argus, the all-seeing giant who guarded Io for Hera who kept her chained to the sacred olive tree at the Argive temple because Zeus wanted the princess. To free the mortal metamorphized by Hera into a young cow, Zeus sent Hermes to slay the giant guard. In this regard, the narrative of Io emerges an homology with Penelope, preparing the sense of the game scene, however, here, Hermes acts as a messenger, not a slayer. The density of the oxen metaphor intensifies further still. The male suitors share substantial features with the many eyed giant, and Penelope appears as their captive. Maintaining these literary insights at the the background of this reflection, I will now look at the semantics of the game in linguistic terms, then I

¹⁰*Od.* 1, 107.

¹¹In this essay all translations of the *Odyssey* are by A.T. Murray (Homer. *The Odyssey* with an English, two volumes. Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, 1919).

will consider the figured pots and after I will take into account two fragments of Heraclitus.

First and foremost the game notifies the idealized educated¹² man, *πεπαιδευμένος*, *pepaidomenos*, who continuously revises matters and repositions himself, differently from the situation regarding the male suitors in the *Odyssey*. Thusly, the game indicates the serious occupation of reflection, even if it also transmits the sense of distraction and amusement, otherwise salient in representations of anonymous characters (figs. 1-2). The game was also a language-thinking stimulator amongst educated men. Indeed, the linguistic play intertwines with objects in merrymaking. “The ludic moment was fundamental for the optimal realization of the symposion: the material games like the kottabos, the dice or the chess are combined with verbal games in their innumerable meanings (riddles, banters, jokes) meet their equivalent in the works of the lyric poets” (Lambrugo and Torre, 2013, 159)¹³. The verb *σπουδάζω*, *spoudazo*, incorporates the feature of seriousness applied to the improvement of oneself or another; while the verb *παίζω*, *paizo*, which often is employed in opposition to *σπουδάζω*, instead sends forth the sense of enjoyment. In this regard, these two items illuminate the wordplay that rises from Achilles and Ajax, who the majority of the figuration represent with no other company apart from themselves, in association with several pictorial indications of the notion of the other through a mirror¹⁴ like composition, which encompasses the process culminating in alterity. It is the semantics of *παίζω*, a verb often associated with the symposion (Lambrugo and Torre, 2013, 159ss) that is materialized in some vases representing *δαίμονες*, *daimones*¹⁵ (see figure 2). The *daimones* are engaged in the game similarly to Achilles and Ajax, especially because this verb also denotes amorous games. This denotation further amplifies the semantic atmosphere of *παίζω* with the sense of strategy, an important feature of the game. All the extant vases that recreate this theme even if they do not all show erotes, still communicate impressions that define connections with this conception, principally through elements that evoke the gymnasium¹⁶, Dionysus and the universe of this god and, generally any presence relatable with the cosmo. The interaction of all these notions portrays

¹²The association of play in education is retaken by Plato, *Rep.* 6, 604c; 487a;c

¹³“Il momento ludico era fondamentale per la buona riuscita del simposio: ai giochi materiali come il cottabo, i dadi o gli scachi si affiancano i giochi verbali nelle loro innumerevoli accezioni (indovinelli, motteggi, scherzi) che trovano riscontro nelle opere dei poeti lirici” (my free translation).

¹⁴Ann Steiner writes “Because Athenian vase-imagery is varied but still highly repetitive, we suspect that this is likewise a redundant system producing crucial cultural information.” See Ann Steiner. *Reading Greek Vases*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12. Indeed, repetition dominates the figuration surfacing important nuances. Specifically, that which is repeated is not exactly the same. In fact, the mirror like construe is significant, principally because, similarly to the reflected image on the mirror, it fundamentally appears the same as the other. By inverting sides, a new perspective comes into sight.

¹⁵The terms *eros* and *daimon* are not interchangeable. I am using *daimon* to designate the divine force.

¹⁶By figuring *erotes*, the depiction alludes to the gymnasium ethics. As Heather Reid comments, *eros* within the gymnasium relates to *arete*, see Heather Reid, “Plato’s Gymnastic Dialogues,” In Heather L. Reid et. al. (Ed.), *Athletics, Gymnastics and Agon in Plato* (Fonte Aretusa: Parnassos Press, 2020), 19.

contexts for τύχη. Indeed, how does strategy work without it? How is amusement possible if certain conditions do not meet? How does alterity emerge independently of τύχη? How do the allusions to Dionysus and the universe of the god also ask these questions?

Figure 2. *Kylix, Black-Figure, c. 550-500. The Game between Prophylactic Eyes*



Source: Denmark, Nationalmuseet AS-8353 © CC-BY-SA.

Heraclitus and the Metaphor of Playing

Rather than answering those questions, I will, instead, consider them to think of and paraphrase two sayings by Heraclitus, in articulation with the figurations of the game, with the aim of finding out how these materials may illuminate bidirectional coherences. To do this, I will pay attention to the words and I will employ observation, thus trying to restore ancient methods. The first saying pointedly addresses the theme of the game by asserting the following: (α) Αἰὼν παῖς ἐστὶ παίζων, πεσσεύων. Παιδὸς ἢ βασιληΐη (fr B52DK)¹⁷, Time, of the cycles, is a child¹⁸ acting like a child, playing at dice: it is the kingdom of the child. The

¹⁷Usually translated as: A lifetime is a child playing, playing checkers: the kingship belongs to a child.

¹⁸What does the comparison to a child mean? What a child is looks at a complex and changeable notion that changes. Did Heraclitus mean that Time is like a child because he considered the innate imitative impulse of the child, and that by imitating it learns, *manthano*, and thus also learn how to deduce, *sylogizesthai*, as did Aristotle? (*Poética* 1448b6-19), or does it pertain to memory and reproduction by memory, in other others, to the child's capacity for taking, gathering and producing something out of it, namely, something generated out of something that enfolds part of what is lost on the way? (*Ética a Nicómaco* 2,1103b23-25; *Política* 7,1332b6-8. See Ömer Aygün *The Middle Included: Logos in Aristotle*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press), 121-124. This is not unlike what Heraclitus asserts on fr. 51, regarding distention. So, returning to fr. 52, Time is to the unfolding of the cosmo as a child is to its unfolding as an adult? The fact remains that Heraclitus mentions *homologia* to designate processes in the *cosmo*. However, if Heraclitus thinks that a child is irrational, as Aristotle does, how does this appear an homology with the cosmo and the *Logos* of it? Even if Heraclitus never defines *logos*. Indeed, Heidegger asks "What is the *Logos*? Heraclitus does not say anywhere in the sayings, remaining for us. Presumably he never said it in the manner of an explanation and the determination of a concept." See Martin Heidegger, *The Inception of*

metaphor that suggests the comparison of time with a child allows two immediate assertions, the first is that similarly to the word child, *pais*, which can apply to a male and to a female, time is thus untied to predetermined features, incorporates a plurality of echoic movements. The second saying expressly mentions a distension that gathers, *ksuniasin*, things that become apart, *diapheromenon*, thus creating harmony through a process that is homologous to the bow and the lyre. Said otherwise, an analogy is being made that refers the articulation between *techne*, the objects that proceed from craft, and the exertion of forces. By making the analogy with the *techne*, e.g., the bow and the lyre, the saying also incorporates the apperception of forces that produce a decisive outcome. In the case of the bow, it would be the arrow hitting the exact spot. In the case of the lyre, this would mean to generate a sound that would sound harmoniously, if played properly. So, the arrow device and the musical instrument have in common a force that is transmitted, and, in the process, part of it is lost, the one that remains in the part that bounces back. Simultaneously, part of that force is incorporated in the object that is propelled forward, the arrow. As to the lyre, a similar process occurs, even if there is no visible object being prompted from the string. However, by pulling out the strings and by letting them go, a vibration is generated. Part of which produces a resonance. The bow and lyre also partake the usage of an empty space to produce the effect of throwing the arrow and to resonate a certain kind of pitch. The bouncing forward and the resonance would, thus, stand for that which comes together, *ksuniasin*. The saying goes as follows: **(b)** Οὐ ξυνιαῖσιν ὄκως διαφερόμενον ἔωυτῶ ὁμολογέει παλίντροπος ἄρμονίη ὄκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης (fr B51DK), *Ou ksuniasin okws diapheromenon ewtw homologeai harmonie okwsper toksou kai lyra*, By themselves, [they] do not [understand] that that which comes apart by distention, διαφερόμενον, gathers, ξυνιαῖσιν, [and] is homologous by re-turning through the same way, similarly to the bow and the lyre.

My point is to observe the coherences that rise from distinct forms of communicating an impression about the human experience. Again, the word *pessos* brings to mind the cosmological address of this compositions. It is perhaps worth noting that a word play between *pessos*, also spelled *pettos*, and *petteutikon*, an astronomic table¹⁹, is perhaps being spelled out here. The material I will be using in this reflection has now been assembled. In order to make visible the invisible thread that binds it together, I will begin by describing the figurations. Given the impossibility of describing every one of them, I will select one pot to be the paradigm for this essay and I will refer to the others when applicable.

Occidental Thinking and Logic: Heraclitus's Doctrine of the Logos. Translated by Julia Goesser Assaiante and S. Montgomery Ewegen (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 189.

¹⁹This family of words contemplates the meaning of organization and order which is in accordance with the cosmological meaning. The word is employed in architecture to name the stone that fits an angle. On the other hand, the verb πέσσω, *pesso*, carries the meaning of maturation and digestion. Therefore, the senses of organization and becoming are encompassed by this family of words (Chantraine 1999, s.u. «Πεσσός»).

The *Eros-Thanatos* Play

The first level of observation derives from a neutral scrutiny of the pictorial composition (Panofsky 1962), as already mentioned above. It reveals two men confronting each other at a tables game. The second level of analysis identifies elms, shields and spears, suggesting that the men are warriors. The third level of observation rises from the astonishment of this combination, principally due to the distancing from the ἔθος, *ethos*, of the warrior. Both men are barefoot, they wear a mixture of daily garments with military attire and they hold spears while playing, giving the impression of being totally absorbed by the game. Additionally, the game between Achilles and Ajax, which are identified by the inscriptions, is not reported as having taken place. All this forms the oddity²⁰ that prompts an enquiry. First, the composition generates a threefold reference to time, appearing distinct apperceptions, namely they denote the intrinsic time belonging to thinking of the game and they indicate an external time, that of the war activities and that of the rhythms of the cosmo, as is revealed by the shields, especially. These show representations of panthers, leopards, serpents and gorgons which communicate the universe of Dionysus with vivacity. Such elements take a further cosmological significance as they are inscribed in the skin of the heroes, the whole forming coherence with empty the helmets over the prominent wilderness probing out of the shields, which lean against a supposed wall, at the back of each hero. For these reasons, the theme of the game sets forth an ἄσκησις, an exercise, otherwise said, a thinking exercise on chaos and order. The transversing of spatial, chronological and metaphysical frontiers refer, fundamentally, to how time is perceived.

For instance, the gravity of the postures and the seriousness of expressions are salient in the composition of the νόστος, *nostos* (Boardman 1978, 18; Woodford 1986, 61; Romero Mariscal 2011, 394), theme, in side B of the amphora by Exekias²¹, from which emerge pairs of tensions as night and day, coming and going, human and animal, old and young, servant and master, life and death that hold the threads of chaos ensuing from side A, thus, complementing the discourse on *tyche*. All these aspects figure out questions being asked by pre-socratic thinkers. Focusing on the importance of opposites in the period under consideration in this paper (Lloyd, 1964) as sufficiency for tension, the most prominent question would be the one that asks what opposites are? what tension is? And, virtually, what one might disclose about the other.

²⁰Aristotle, *Poetics* 1458a 18-34.

²¹See Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco 16757.

Figure 3. Erotas

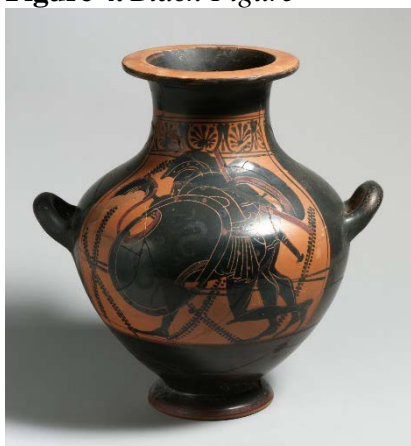
Source: (see figure 2)

The Copenhagen National Museum (hereafter CNM) *Kylix* (figures 2-3) does not include the score of the game, unlike Exekias's amphora which mentions the τύχη of each hero. Therefore I will now refer to it, in order to obtain a fuller grasp of the composition respecting the CNM *kylix*, and later, I will return to this cup, after describing the relevant points respecting Exekias's pot. Here, both heroes seem to communicate their score in person as is suggested by the manner in which the inscription is placed, close to the mouth, thusly bearing an able resemblance to present day comics. Achilles says τεσσαρα (τέσσαρες) and Ajax announces τρι[α]. The numbers become more significant if articulated with a line from Aristophanes and with the figuration of dead Achilles being carried by Ajax, which recalls the game *ephedrizo*, where the loser must carry the winner. Regarding the former, Dionysus in *The Frogs* tells that Achilles made a double throw, one of two and the other of four²². If to this one adds the ancient costume of throwing three dice, one begins to observe the tension between winning and loosing which is being unfolded by these theme, as the latter circumstance indicates. Achilles throws the highest score, but it is Ajax that carries him dead (fig. 4). Therefore, these two configurations, respectively, the tables game, and the carrying of the body (figure 4)²³, highlight the questioning of the notions of winning and losing as they also suggest life as a process where τύχη throws mankind into a tension between the burden and the celebration, as the wordplay between *ephedrizo*, the play activity, and *ephedria*, ambush, seem to declare.

²²βέβληκ Ἀχιλλεὺς δύο κύβω καὶ τέτταρα (*The Frogs*, 1400).

²³Münich, Antikensammlungen SL 458; 1470; Vatican City, 370; Hearst Historical State Monument 9815; Bologne-sur-Mer, Château Musée 565; Japan, private collection (data collected from Anonymous, 2020).

Figure 4. *Black-Figure*



Source: New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 96.18.63© Public Domain

Regardless of other readings pertaining the sense of the figurations that include Athena²⁴, Achilles is being favoured. Still, Exekias's amphora declares what extant configurations imply but do not actually assert, specifically it writes Achilles's name in the genitive case, *Achilleos*. By doing so, the comparison between the two heroes becomes explicit. Even if the heroes by themselves would have constituted the sufficient condition to prompt to the beholder the remembrance of the myth concerning, the articulation between the pictorial and the linguistic objectifies the ethical message that grows out of this particular employment of the lexical unit.

In this regard, the main quality that emerges from the figuration, not solely from that of Exekias, is the status of the pictorial composition as an homology that mimetizes the cosmo and the process of being human in it. Thusly, fiction stands out as a tool for reflexion on how the cosmo operates and how the human becomes alterity and might deal with this change, as a being that finds itself living involuntarily in the cosmo, while also being part of it.

Description of the Exekias's Amphora²⁵

Side A shows two men seated on cylindrical stools. Between them a table shorter than the stools marks the middle of the amphora. Behind each man is a shield leaning against a wall, presumably, as suggested by the coincidence with the ends of the pot. The drawing shows a man sitting on the left side, wearing a helmet with a red crest, a coat of mail and a mantle over the shoulders, which is filled with

²⁴Boardman (1966, 470) associates Athena's gesture of pointing towards Achilles with censure, as a worn that they should return to battle instead of playing: "Our picture [side A] shows Ajax and Achilles playing a board-game with dice, interrupted by Athena who calls them to the more serious business of war, for which they are ready equipped." This is an evidence of the fecundity of the figurations and of the exercise they address to the beholder. By providing a connection with daily life, they draw the tension between what could have been, what was, and what could be drawn out of that which is there to be observed.

²⁵Amphora, black-figure, c. 575-525, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano 16757.

drawings resembling the finest embroidery, including floral motives and geometric patterns. The most salient pattern is the meander, but the *τρισκελής*, *triskeles*, and the *τετρασκελής*, *tetraskeles*, are also represented. The legs of the hero are protected with *cnemides*, but the arms and the feet are bare. The right shoulder, over the medial deltoid, the head of a leopard is inscribed on the skin; this allusion to intractable forces on the shield of Achilles are thus extended to the body of the hero with a cosmic significance, in that it warns what is external to the individual, but also part of it. The hero's thighs repeat the curved line also visible on the inner part of his elbow. His left hand holds two spears with the edges facing upwards. The shield behind this individual is beocean, as the oval typology with lateral outward facing demi-circles indicates. The head of a satyre, a serpent and a leopard are represented on the surface of this object.

The male figure opposite to the one just described wears a headband that keeps his curls in place. His armour is similar to the one worn by the other man. However, he does not wear the helm, which rests over the shield behind him, with the front looking at the wall. The arm is unadorned and free of drawings. Contrastingly, beneath the *χλαμύς*, *chlamys*, of Ajax, also appears the head of a wild feline, however it betrays the impression of timidness, while the gorgon on his shield sends out a message of ferocity addressed to the opponents.

Both men are totally absorbed in the game, as indicated by the angle of the torsos and the bent heads. The arms of the heroes display a diagonal extension in accordance with the active gesture of the fingers. However, considering the observations mentioned earlier, their attitude is not quite the same. That the man on the left side could rise immediately should this be necessary is clear from the angle formed by his legs, which shows awareness, as the spears held by the free hand also announce. Indeed it has been asserted that the spears draw an inverted triangle, at the center of which the heads of the heroes stand out (Schneider 1968, 36). This cfelineomposition is thusly unified, while it also geometrizes the all, accentuating the process of thinking.

Both human figures seem, therefore, germane, yet differences are discernable. Two inscriptions map out the scene (Stansbury-O'Donnell, 2006) indicating Achilles, to the left, and Ajax to the right. That these are the best of the Achaeans decides the importance of the figuration, however, the fact that Ajax is underrepresented²⁶ as opposed to Achilles, emphasizes the relevance of the pictorial composition.

The pictorial field is divided in two halves as marked by the low table at the center. Achilles occupies the whole surface of the stool and bends his torso slightly over the table. His right foot is firmly set on the ground; the left foot rests against the stool with the forefront on the floor easing the standing position if needed. On the whole, the gesture suggests fluidity, despite the impression of firmness of the hand that throws the dice, which echoes the concentration on the game and the attitude of readiness. This is further conveyed by the fine curved line that draws the eyebrow and the centered eyes. On the contrary, Ajax occupies but the forefront area of the stool, bends his torso excessively over the table, his feet are not firmly

²⁶The interest that Exekias manifests for Ajax might rise from the fact that the cult of Ajax is vibrant in Salamina, the home polis of Exekias's (Woodford 1980, 417-434).

set on the ground and the diagonal line described by the spears overlaps his right arm. The spears do not stand on the ground, which may indicate stress or unbalance. This is more evident on the white of his eye, which brings out the half-closed gaze that the full curved line of the eyebrow accentuates, revealing stress²⁷. All this compromises the hero's attention to the surrounding middle, while his body posture signals instability. The black lines communicate expression and surface emotion to the face, while the gestures stimulate the beholder to compose his narrative.

The shields contribute significantly to this reflexion. Although it congregates many layers of meaning, vase painting is not symbolic. Still, the signs that integrate the compositions, such as the shields, are telling. Being the object that differentiates the hoplite, the shield intertwines daily life and fiction as thinking nutrition, while it also evokes illusion in the military action. In fact, one could imagine the effect of the sun over the metal and the impression this body of brilliance would have had over the opponents. The shield might create the illusion of protection, however this equipment also served the function of transporting the fallen warrior back home. In this sense, the shield by itself may communicate alterity, giving also rise to dyads such as trophée-blood price, life-death, onself-otherness. In the figuration, the shields take these meanings beyond. The shield of Achilles²⁸ has a satyr represented, an important presence in the tyasos who is prone to pleasures and excitement, a wine, dance, music and, fundamentally, a maened lover, thus signaling part of the complex universe of the god Dionysus. The second element, a serpent, sets forth ctonism and announces vigilance and premonition, and marks the good and the evil, life, death and vengeance. The serpent sheds its skin warning of cycles of annihilation and renewal, and giving a sign to civilization, to orientation and to prophecy. The serpent is associated to Hera, the goddess of the Hour, who presides at the event. However, it has been noted that the serpent also is an attribute of Athena and of the ctonic goddess Demeter. The third element, the leopard or the panther, reports Dionysus. Contrastingly, but also, complementarily, the shield of Ajax shows the head of Medusa, the only mortal amongst the Gorgons. Accordingly, death, the unthinkable and the unspeakable, but also sterility and repulse, discern this composite creature that indicates absolute alterity Paradiso (1992)²⁹, which Ajax faces from the backside. Mythology tells of a victorious Perseus, who managed to petrify the Medusa using his shield as a mirror.

Such elements rise the metaphor on the heaviness of destiny over mankind. This is the thesis advanced by Junker (2012, 194), who mentions a poem, lost today, that told of the sound of a trumpet that would have distracted the heroes

²⁷In the work of Exekias the double line is associated to expressions of mourning. Regarding this, Moore (1980, 419 footnote 12) writes: "Double brows for the eyebrow occur elsewhere in the work of Exekias: on two mourners, one on Berlin F 1811 and the one who looks at the viewer on Berlin F 1818 (ABV 146, 22-23) [...]". The author adds that apart from two exceptions, the line is related to anxiety: "with the exception of Tyndareus and the old man, these are persons under stress."

²⁸ Similarly, the *Iliad* (*Il.* 18, 483-609) integrates the cosmo in the shield of Achilles, though the verbal mode of expression invites a detailed description encompassing the stars, the sea, mankind, nonhuman animals and modes of being in the cosmo, through a sensorial atmosphere.

²⁹The Gorgon was an omnipresent force since the infancy (Strabo 1, 2, 8).

causing the battlefield to be invaded. If such a poem ever existed, it would not be in accordance with the heroic vocation of Achilles. In fact, the myth tells that Thetys sent Achilles to the kingdom of Lycomedes, where he lived disguise as a girl so that he would not have to participate in the war at Troy. However, Odysseus played the trompet and Achilles suddenly betrayed his disguise by immediately preparing to fight.

I now return to the figuration by Exekias. By representing the heroes playing a dice game in the context of ctonic elements, this composition incorporates a the invisible thread that creates a tension between the quest for glory and the death danger it implies, thus equating *τύχη*, *thyche*, and *κλέος*, *kleos*. The shields of both heros enclose them between seduction and petrification, projecting the metaphor of the warrior to address the human being condition. The dice over the table import verosimilitude to the composition, by bringing life and death together, since the coeval Athenians were in the habit of putting dice in the graves. The frontality of the face of the Medusa further signals death, the vanquished warrior, the wounded one, and merely a difficult circumstance as well as all situations falling in the margins by diverging from the expected (Korshak 1987, 43-44)³⁰.

Making Sense of Kastor and Polydeukes

These meanings are complexified by the figuration in side B kastor and Polydeukes³¹. The latter is by his horse and former, who has shed his clothes³², is being greeted by the dog. Also present are their mother, Leda, and the father, Tyndareos. A servant brings bath amenities, thus signaling a happy return home. This is an important figuration because the twins form a metaphor for the interdependence in the military life, where the survival of one depends on the other. The warriors ate and drank together and would alongate these affinities to the battlefield Runciman (1990, 73).

Therefore, side B seems to complement *tyche* on side A with the sense of a save return home (Boardman 1978, 24), thus marking a principal theme, the *nostos*. As the *Dioscourai* are identified, “Polydeukes, Leda, Kyllaros, Kastor, Tyndareos”, the *universal interest* (Mackay, 1979, 476) of this scene is brought to the forefront. The beholder familiar with the bond between this two brothers, Polydeukes, offsprings of Zeus and Leda, and Kastor, son of Leda and Tyndareos, would relate this theme with that of side A, and therefore would be aware of the strangeness of representing them together, since the most salient feature of the *Dioscourai* is that Kastor was wounded to death by Idas and Zeus wanted to take him to live amongst the gods. However, Polydeukes refused immortality if this implied the opposite for Kastor, you had been also wounded but descended into Hades. So, Zeus agreed that that they both should live in the midst of the gods, yet

³⁰Platt e Squire (2017, *passim*) think otherwise.

³¹See Vatican, Museo Gregoriano etrusco 16757.

³²The notice on BAPD reads thusly. Viewing the battlefield from the walls of Troy Helen mentions that she cannot see her brothers (*Iliad* 3.236-242).

in alternated days³³. In this respect, the figuration seems to imply awareness of feelings as a bond whose strength surpasses perpetual life.

Figure 5. *Kylix, Red-Figure, 510-500*



Source: British Museum 1836,0224.125. ©The Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

This indicates the voluntary³⁴ action that proceeds from the scope of values and is totally unrelated with desire or with self-interest. Thusly, it sends forth a message within the scope of abnegation, of *consortium*, and, notably, of responsibility. In other words, it hints the commitment to sharing the *tyche* of and with another and the understanding that such conjuncture is not voluntary.

Therefore, by bringing together that which, by the action of a higher force, Zeus, cannot be together, this thematic mentions two particular individuals, but pertains to a universal inclusion.

Additionally, a focus is laid on the notion of *nostos*, since this theme intertwines with the circle of return³⁵. Thusly, the *Dioskouri* composition emerges an exercise expressing the interdependence of feelings and values in the assurance of a safe return home, thus providing the ingredients to breed an ethic path. In this regard, the fact that the *Dioskouri* are twins but do not proceed from the same paternal source hints an inclusive ethics. Indeed, from this configuration emerges

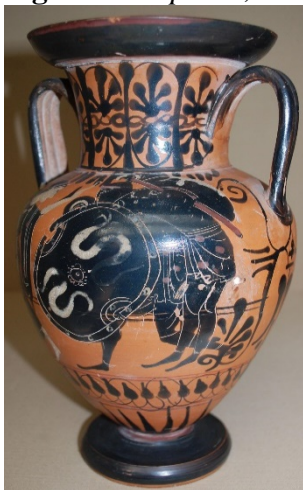
³³This does not forcefully represent a contradiction. Indeed, in cosmological terms, it represents an homology with the notion of the relativity offered by perspective, similarly to the distinct depictions on the sides of the vases. The fundamental is that the stress lies on the perspectives offered by the beholder. New questions rise and meaning unfolds in many directions depending on the perspective, which accounts for the various genealogical and chronological oddities in myth, in which the Dioskouroi are paradigmatic (see Avi Kapach. “The Dioskouri between Time and Eternity: A Study in Greek Myth and Genealogy.” *New England Classical Journal*, 50, 1(2023):31-56.

³⁴ Aristotle writes extensively on this subject. For a substantial account of the relevant passages, see Jay Elliott, “Aristotle on the Voluntariness of Vice.” In Gary M. Goulet and William Wians (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 36 (1) (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 65-88.

³⁵Similarly to Achilles, the twins were reported to having been seen by sailors approaching the White Island (Hedreen, 1991, 322). This too, is relatable with the empirical life, for instance, Boardman (1978, 24) writes “If Exekias’ attitude to tyranny in Athens was anything like what we have suspected from his use of other myth scenes and heroic figures, he would have been very likely to promote a mythical parable — normal Greek procedure in commenting on a contemporary dilemma — which might both comfort and give warning that, in the face of tyranny and defeat, survival lies with alert.”

the impression of the weighing of moral (caring for the other), civil and human rights (deliberations of Zeus). Another impression that rises regards the acknowledgement of equality between beings, all involuntarily thrown into existence, as suggested by the circumstance that makes them twins, not solely brothers. Side A joins this material by representing exercise on the notions of *tyche* and alterity in human life. Additionally, the two heros not only share kinsmanship, but, similarly, one of them supports the other by carrying his body³⁶ (figure 6). Ajax, the second best of the Achaeans, carries of the body of dead Achilles. As a consequence of being deprived of his earned right to the arms of Achilles, the Telamonian in heroic nakedness and close to a palm tree deliberates and performs his death, as suggested by this black-figure amphora³⁷, thus partaking of the destiny of the best of the Achaeans. Again, an exercise on the voluntary and moral responsibility is being addressed, with the common denominator of arbitrariness.

Figure 6. *Amphora, Black-Figure, c. 490-480*



Source: British Museum 1836,0224.135. © CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0

Furthermore, the technique is in accordance with the substance. Thusly, a nother point worthy of mention concerns the use of the black-figure technique. As it is, by the time Exekias created this amphora, the red-figure technique had been invented. So this tells that Exekias used the black-figure technique deliberately. Such choice highlights the interpretation respecting death and loss and maps out

³⁶Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria 1729.4; Japan, private collection; Bologne-sur-Mer Château Musée 565; Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco 370; München, Antikensammlungen SL 458; 1470. The following examples are from Woodford e Loudon 1980, 27 footnote 11 and were taken from Figueira 2020): San Simeon 5516, ssw 9848; British Museum B279; Bruxelles R314; Toulouse 26.097 (336); Siracuse 21926; Musée do Louvre F 305; Villa Giullia 47934; Mon Ant 42 (1955) 562, 131b; Lucern Market, *Paralipomena* 157.9 ter.; München S.L.458 and 1519 (J651); California Market, Summa Galleries September 1979, n.º 5.

³⁷Boulogne-sur-Mer, Musée Communale 558. The Gorgon figured on the shield articulates the death preparations with the abyssal laughter og that dark force, see Ana Rita Figueira, *Iconografia de Aquiles: Teatralidade, Retórica e Comunicação na Cerâmica Grega dos Séculos VI e V a.C.* (Doctoral thesis, Lisboa: Universidade de Lisboa).

the apotropaic function³⁸ of the prophylactic eyes. This pictorial syntax names protection with an accent on the theme of *tyche*. I conclude here the digression on Exekias's amphora and return now to the CNM *kylix* (Fig.2-3), which materializes an explicit connection between *tyche*, *eros-thanatos* with the twofold theme of alterity, thusly indicating the inner metamorphosis of self and the other individual, the distinct being.

In a wider sense, the ἔρωτες, *erotes*, signal powerful forces that subject mankind, however, the CNM *kylix* unfolds a *mise en abîme* structure that, including that general appreciation, also encompasses a threefold awareness of how narratives intertwines with factic life. The first recognizes occurrences with a date and a place, the second understands that by placing heroes in contexts that evoke them, the suggestion that “it actually happened” may become a reality, perhaps even more so than if they were real people (Sparkes 1996, 133). The third has it that by replacing Achilles and Ajax by *erotes* that impression is enhanced, specially because the object also representates the heroes in a mirror-like distribution. The semantic density thikens as either erotic pair, the *erotes* and Achilles and Ajax, occupy the area below the handles, habitually a seat for the dead and for the body recovered from the battlefield. In figures 2-3. the thumb and the index fingers of the *daimon* scoring the lower punctuation are extended, thus formalizing the gesture that could be verblized by the verb ἀπαγορεύω, *apagoreo*, which incorporates the meaning of renunciation.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty respecting the κηροσταςία, *kerostasia*, of *eros*³⁹ (Morrison 1997, 276; 278), these pots arise an homology pertaining to the conceptual framework of this notion that might shed some light on the matter. Hence, the game between Achilles and Ajax projects the last stand of the son of Thetis and Peleus, while it also tightens the affinities shared by both in death, thus outlining the foreordination of the latter. The fragment in the Puskin Museum complements this discourse as it depicts, presumably, Achilles prompted by an *eros*.

³⁸Platt e Squire (2017, 160-161).

³⁹The notion of a cosmic *Eros* emerges from the observation that an oak and a rock can be sources of truth, *aletheia*, Plato, *Phaedo* 275c-275d). Ferreira writes that this idea “seems to be an adaptation of an adage that already surges in the *Iliad* 22. 126, in the *Odyssey* 19. 163, in Hesiod, *Teogony* 35.” (*Fedro*, footnote 166, p. 121). The *Orphic Hymns* seem to convey this notion. For instance, (a) through the ambivalence of Dionysus and the celebration associated to the god (52); (b) through the circulation of the Moirai (58). The *Iliad* (22, 209-211) addresses explicitly to the *kerostasia* of Achilles and of Hector: “the Father [Zeus] lifted on high his golden scales, and set therein two fates of grievous death, one for Achilles, and one for horse-taming Hector; then he grasped the balance by the midst and raised it.” (Transl. A.T. Murray. Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press and London, William Heinemann, 1924).

Figure 8. *Kylix fragment*⁴⁰, *Black-figure c. 550-500. An Eros Propels Achilles into Action*



Source: My drawing of Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts M927

Conclusions

In this last section, I assemble some remarks that map out the subject of this paper. By bringing together a threefold variation of the dice game a pictorial exercise on alterity appeared, with an accent on *tyche*. The first model suggested a leisure scene alluding to daily life and to gymnasium activities; the second observed how this scene transformed leisure into a mixture between factic military occurrences and mythological circumstances by replacing anonymous characters with Achilles and Ajax. The third model was represented by two variants. One depicted *erotes* instead of the heroes, and the other combined both. Because this second variant ascribes to Achilles and Ajax the area under the handle, which is usually reserved to represent the dead, especially those who have fallen in battle, it further contributes to underline the message, with an emphasis on the gymnasium erotic conduct. This demonstrated that the effect of oscillation causing the beholder to form an apperception between myth and chronological events to discover the exercise emerging an autonomous gathering of material to think of. Such material unfolded the variegated conceptual sphere of alterity with an accent on actions of responsibility, as consented by the figuration of the *Dioscuroi*. That *tyche* played an important role was evident from the appraisal of the principal sides of the pots that have been examined. The linguistic enquiry revealed the equation between human experience and cosmological appearances. The presence of Athena further reinforced the association with chronological events, while the ἔρωτες refictionalized the theme of the game, thus indicating *eros* as a force acting on mankind and on the cosmo. Heraclitus's fragments B51-52DK contributed with the notion of an interplay encompassing analogical processes formed by varied imitative and innovative actions, like a child's. *Tyche* acted on alterity, partially independently of human action, partially deriving from an homological process in which novelty is incorporated.

⁴⁰See Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts M927.

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