David
Art III

# The Art and Culture of Early Greece, 1100–480 B.C.

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Greek.[20] Perhaps more than anything else, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* definitively told the early Greeks who they were.

## Homeric Questions

In the thirteenth book of the *Iliad* (l. 658) a minor Trojan ally named Pylaimenes mourns the death of his son—a trifling event were it not for the fact that eight books earlier (V.576–79) Pylaimenes had been quite thoroughly slain himself. Pylaimenes' notorious resurrection can be explained in one of two ways: either Homer simply forgot whom he had killed off five thousand lines earlier, or the poet of Book XIII was not the poet of Book V. To admit that Homer nodded in the later book but to claim that his listening audience would not have noticed anyway (especially since they could not flip back through the pages of a written text to check up on him) was once the choice of a school of scholars known as the unitarians. To be a unitarian was to believe in the fundamental unity and integrity of the Homeric epics. It was to believe that each poem (or both of them) was the product of a single controlling intellect. To maintain, on the other hand, that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were the creations of many minds, and therefore to doubt even the reality of a poet called Homer, was the choice of a rival school of scholars known as the analysts. To be an analyst was to devote one's philological energies and skills to the tidy dissection of each epic. It was to search the poems for contradictions, inconsistencies, and interpolations that, taken together, "prove" that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were really patchwork poems, stitched together from shorter lays. The epics were botched concatenations produced by editorial committees, or they were accretions produced by many Homers, who added episode after episode to some original core. They were anything but inherently unified works of art.

The question of unity—the Homeric question par excellence—is not asked so much anymore, at least not in the same way. The debate between unitarians and analysts lost its edge because of Milman Parry's argument that, while the Homeric epics and their language cannot be divorced from a lengthy oral tradition shaped by many voices before Homer's, one gifted singer, equipped with a prodigious store of formulae, could have given the poems the forms in which we have them, more or less. The "more or less" is itself an important issue. But today the Homeric question has generally yielded to the Parry question, which is a question not of artistic unity but of genius and originality. What can those words mean in the context of an oral formulaic tradition? Is it possible to detect a personal design in the

20. See Eric A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 106–14.

poems? Who or what should get the credit for the masterpieces known as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey?* Was Homer the genius? Or was his tradition?[21]

These are not the only questions Homeric scholars have to ask themselves. When, for instance, were the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* composed? Majority opinion: in the second half of the eighth century. Which epic came first? Since antiquity the almost universal response has been the *Iliad:* one ancient critic even supposed that the *Iliad,* full of energy and action, was the work of Homer's vigorous early years, while the *Odyssey,* less intense and "mostly narrative," was the work of Homer's more leisurely and contemplative old age. But did, in fact, one poet compose both poems? The most likely answer, in my view, is no. It is not just that similes are used less often in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad,* or that the structures of the poems differ so much (the plot of the *Odyssey,* which weaves together the story of Telemachos, Odysseus' own recollection of his fabulous adventures, and his triumphant return, is more complex than the linear design of the *Iliad,* yet it lacks the *Iliad's* satisfying sense of an ending). It is not just that their landscapes are (necessarily) so different, or that the *Odyssey* seems to reflect genuine late-eighth-century experience (colonization, the rise of the polis, the growth of a Greek sense of identity in the face of *barbaroi*) in a way the *Iliad* does not. And it is not just that the heroes are so different (within the *Iliad* itself Akhilleus and Odysseus hardly see eye to eye) or that the moods of the epics differ (the *Iliad,* pervaded by absolutes and harsh truths, is a highly concentrated poem about fate, choice, and the fame that is the hero's only compensation for death, while the *Odyssey* is more expansive in its outlook and is concerned primarily with identity, survival, restoration, and justice). It is rather that the *Odyssey* seems to be a response to the *Iliad,* even a critique of it. Certainly, it is also an elegy for the heroic world the *Iliad* describes: in Book XI of the *Odyssey,* the great heroes of the *Iliad*—Akhilleus, Agamemnon, Ajax—appear again, but as shades in the underworld, and in Book XXIV the poet gives details of Akhilleus' funeral, a kind of last farewell. But at times the *Odyssey* appears to question the very premises of the *Iliad.* The eerie song the Sirens sing (XII.184–91) is nothing but the song of Troy (an *Iliad?*) and it kills those who hear and are not restrained. In the realm of the dead, Akhilleus repudiates the decision that Patroklos' death forced upon him in the *Iliad:*

> Do not speak sweetly of my death, shining Odysseus.
> I would rather be bound to work the land
> of some impoverished man, whose livelihood is scant,
> than to rule over all the descended dead.
>
> [XI.488–91]

21. See, for instance, Nagy, *Best,* 5, 78–79.

Now even in the *Iliad* Akhilleus says he values life over fame (IX.401–9), but spoken in Hades to the living Odysseus these words refute the principal motive for heroic action: immortal glory (*kleos*) is not adequate recompense for death after all.

But perhaps the crucial difference between the two poems is the *Odyssey's* self-reflexiveness, its own concern with the poetic task. Though in the *Iliad* artistic activity is a guise or metaphor for poetic activity (Hephaistos is a performing artist when he makes the Shield; Helen, at III.125–28, weaves the saga of Troy into cloth), epic performance is specifically referred to only once, when Akhilleus himself, detached from the society of heroes, sings the fame of men (IX.189). In contrast, poets and poetry form a major theme of the *Odyssey:* in a sense, the *Odyssey* is *about* poetry. There are the bards Phemios and Demodokos and their songs, of course. There is Telemachos' sharp defense of poetry, the first in Western literature (I.345–52). There is Odysseus himself, who not long after praising all bards (VIII.479–81) proceeds to tell one-sixth of his own epic (Books IX–XII). Odysseus is often compared to a poet, but nowhere with greater self-conscious force than at the climactic moment of the *Odyssey,* when the hero strings his bow and a simile fuses the identities of hero and bard:

> As a man skilled in the lyre and song
> stretches a new string easily upon a peg,
> holding the twisted gut at both ends,
> so then Odysseus strung his great bow without trouble,
> and with his right hand tried the cord:
> it sang sweetly, like a swallow's song.
> Sickening anguish gripped the suitors then,
> and the skin of all turned pale. . . .
>
> [XXI.406–13]

As he performed those lines the Homer of the *Odyssey* momentarily became Odysseus, his lyre became the hero's weapon, and the notes he plucked sang out the suitors' death. This intrusion of poet and poetry into the *Odyssey* is completely foreign to the tone of the *Iliad,* where the poet is invisible or else humble (cf. II.488–93) and where the value and effects of poetry are practically ignored. The contrast may well be explained by the simple fact that the composer of the *Odyssey* operated in a poetic milieu far different from that of the composer of the *Iliad* (assuming the *Iliad* did come first): he worked in a world that for the first time contained a poetic masterpiece, and he had to match it.[22] The mere existence of the *Iliad* altered the

22. See J. Redfield, "The Making of the *Odyssey*," in *Parnassus Revisited*, ed. Anthony Yu (Chicago, 1973), 141–54, and *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (Chicago, 1975), 35–41, and now W. G. Thalmann, *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry* (Baltimore, 1984), 157–84.

literary environment and challenged succeeding poets to rethink their art and subject. It was anxiety that forced the poet of the *Odyssey* to eulogize and respond to the *Iliad* and make his own labor a theme.

The list of Homeric questions goes on. How many lines could Homer (let us continue to use the same name for both poets) recite or compose at one sitting? On what sort of occasions did he perform?[23] Was Homer blind? Thucydides, who was not gullible, thought he was, believing that the author of the seventh-century *Hymn to Apollo*[24] was Homer himself:

> Now may Apollo and Artemis be gracious,
> and farewell, all you maidens. But remember me
> hereafter, whenever any man upon the earth,
> some much-suffering stranger, comes here and asks:
> "Maidens, which singer who frequents this place
> is sweetest and in whom do you most delight?"
> Then answer all in one:
> "A blind man. He lives in rugged Chios
> and his songs will be best hereafter."
>
> [Ll. 165–73]

Demodokos, the Phaiakian bard, was blind, too, and that circumstance has tempted some scholars to recognize in him a Homeric self-portrait. But blindness is conventionally associated with wisdom and insight in ancient (as in later) literature—it is almost a prerequisite for insight—and the tradition of a sightless Homer is really without foundation. Besides, the poets of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were simply too fond of things that shine.

If Homer could see, could he read and write? This is the last great Homeric question, and it needs to be asked because it was toward the middle of the eighth century that the Greeks, who had been illiterate for about four hundred years, created their alphabet. What they did was to appropriate twenty-two letters of the Phoenician (northern Semitic) script, change the values of some to vowels (the Phoenicians had only consonants), and invent a handful of letters of their own.[25] The Greek debt to

23. See G. S. Kirk, *Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962), 274–81, and Thalmann (n. 22), 118–19.

24. The *Hymn to Apollo* is perhaps the earliest of the thirty-three so-called Homeric hymns, which may have been sung as prefaces to epic recitations.

25. As Kevin Robb has written, "the Phoenician sign stood for a consonant *plus any vowel*, the vowel being supplied from context by a reader. The Greek sign, and this for the first time in the history of writing, stands for an abstraction, the isolated consonant" ("Poetic Sources of the Greek Alphabet," in *Communication Arts in the Ancient World*, ed. Eric A. Havelock and Jackson A. Hershbell [New York, 1978], 31; italics in original). By the same token, the new, visible distinction between consonant and vowel in Greek is a manifestation of an analytical impulse, a desire to break down wholes (in this case syllables) into their component parts, which seems particularly Geometric and Greek.

Phoenicia is clear from (among other things) the Greek word for book or writing materials, *byblos*, which is taken from the name of a Phoenician city. But where was the debt first incurred? Many scholars favor Al Mina, the Levantine emporium where Greeks and Phoenicians lived side by side (despite the fact that there is no writing from eighth- or seventh-century Al Mina), but cases could also be made for Cyprus, Rhodes, Crete, Athens, Euboia, and even Ischia. Most scholars have also assumed that the Greeks learned to write for the same reasons that Phoenicians wrote: to keep commercial records. The trouble is that there is no evidence to back up the assumption: there are no Phoenician or Greek mercantile inscriptions of around or before 700, and there is no such thing as an eighth- or seventh-century Greek numeral.[26]

Two of the earliest examples of written Greek are, in fact, poetic, and probably the older of them comes from Athens. It was scratched on the shoulder of a cheap, plain Late Geometric jug sometime after the vase was made (in the Dipylon Workshop), around 740 [36]. It is not certain that it was an Athenian that scratched it, and the crudity of the lettering suggests that the author was not a practiced scribe in any case. But he was a fairly practiced poet. There is one complete verse and it is in dactylic hexameter, the meter of epic: "*hos nun orcheston panton atalotata paizei*" (He who of all the dancers now performs most lightly . . .). A dozen uncertain letters follow, doubtless reading something on the order of "shall have me" (or "this vase"). At all events, the diction as well as the meter is Homeric: *atalotata* ("most lightly") echoes the use of the word *atala* to describe the dancers on Akhilleus' shield (*Iliad*, XVIII.567).

The author of a slightly later inscription had far better penmanship and was evidently a more accomplished (and more witty) poet besides. The lines are again scratched on a vase—a simple cup made in Rhodes but buried with its owner on Ischia around 720.[27] The first line is possibly prose, possibly an iambic trimeter, but the second and third are certainly dactylic hexameters, and the sense is this:

> I am Nestor's cup, good to drink from.
> Whoever drinks from me will at once be seized
> By desire for fair-crowned Aphrodite.

It is possible, of course, that the owner of the cup really was named Nestor. But the name rings a loud bell, and the ironic allusion (made in grandiose epic language on the surface of a very plain cup) is probably to the monu-

26. For a recent review of the evidence, see A. Johnston, "The Extent and Use of Literacy," in *Greek Renaissance*, 63–68.

27. See P. A. Hansen, "Pithecusan Humor: The Interpretation of 'Nestor's Cup' Reconsidered," *Glotta*, 54 (1976), 25–43.

36. Late Geometric I oinochoe from the Dipylon cemetery (Athens NM 192), around 740. Photo courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens.

mental gold cup of Nestor, king of Pylos, which is described in the *Iliad* (XI.632–35). If it is, the epic (or part of the epic) had been heard as far west as Ischia by around 720: "Homer" traveled fast.

To judge from the extant evidence (which is about all we can judge from) it looks as if the need to jot down lines of poetry, not commercial accounts, was one reason for the invention of the Greek alphabet (and its all-important vowels)[28] in the middle of the eighth century. Another, probably, was the need to record ownership of personal property.[29] But in any case, we have to ask whether it is likely that a poet in Athens around 740 or some wag on Ischia around 720 could write hexameters and Homer, their rough contemporary, could not. It would help if there were some pointed allusions to writing in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but there are none, except for VII.175 of the *Iliad*, where Greek heroes crudely make their marks on lots (literacy is hardly implied here), and VI.168–70, where Glaukos relates that his ancester Bellerophon was sent to Lykia with a tablet engraved with "many deadly signs"—deadly because they ordered Bellerophon's murder. These signs are probably not the oral tradition's dim recollection of a Bronze Age script such as Linear B but an eighth-century poet's acknowledgment of the existence of a contemporary alphabet—something still generally mysterious, something that might prove deadly to the oral tradition itself.[30] Yet it should be stressed that composing in the *style* of an oral poet and conceiving of poetry as a process are not necessarily incompatible with being literate. There is no reason why Homer, a performing bard, could not have known how to write.

We have no idea whether a full-length late-eighth-century manuscript of the *Iliad* actually existed. To be sure, writing 15,000 hexameters on leather scrolls or wooden tablets would have been a far more awesome task than scratching a couple of verses on a jug or cup, but the task would not have been much easier in the seventh or sixth century when papyrus was more common. Still, if it is just possible to imagine a Late Geometric text of Homer, we do not need to imagine one. Perhaps Homer wrote down only a few critical passages (the programmatic first seven lines of the *Iliad*, for instance), or a broad outline of scenes or episodes, or notes to prompt and remind him—something on the order of "Call the wife of Meleagros Kleopatrē" (her name means the same thing as Patroklos', and just as her tears at IX.590–96 move her prideful husband to fight, so will Patroklos' weeping at the beginning of Book XVI move Akhilleus to act). Such notes

28. Because of the special nature of Greek meter—the rhythm depends on the quantity of syllables as determined by the length of the vowels the syllables contain—the best explanation for the invention of vowels is that they were essential to the proper writing of poetry. Business ledgers did not need them. See Robb (n. 25), 29–32.

29. That is Johnston's argument (n. 26).

30. See W. Burkert, "Oriental Myth and Literature in the *Iliad*," in *Greek Renaissance*, 51–53.

to himself would not have altered Homer's traditional formulaic language. They *would* have made his performance less than spontaneous, his *Iliad* less than improvised, less than purely oral. They would have allowed Homer to compose a far more intricate and internally allusive epic than sheer extemporaneity could permit, and a far more monumental one as well: there is every reason to believe that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were exceptional in their lengths as well as in their quality,[31] and their size seems a poetic manifestation of the general Late Geometric impulse for monumentality [cf. 33, 35, 37]. No matter how much they resemble oral poems, then, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were not typical of the epics sung in the eighth century: that is why they and not some other poems were preserved in the first place. Their uniqueness, or a portion of it, is best explained by their poet's knowledge and use of writing, by his increased ability to *plan*.

The genius of Homer and the beginnings of Greek literacy were contemporary. It is likely that they were also inseparable. The alphabet, perhaps invented so that poetry might be made visible and tangible, enabled one great poet (or two) to transcend his (their) own merely audible tradition.[32] That, I think, is one answer to the Parry question.

## Formula and Foreground: Homer and the Dipylon Style

Just before the middle of the eighth century, one of Athens' leading families awarded an important commission to one of the city's handful of potter's workshops. A noblewoman (the family's matriarch?) had just died or was about to die, and a gigantic vase was required to stand over her grave in a cemetery not far from the later city gate known as the Dipylon (Double Door). The vase could receive libations poured by mourners, but its function was essentially commemorative: it was both the sign (*sēma*) of the noblewoman's tomb and her memorial (*mnēma*), a monument of remembrance.

Tradition determined the type of vase it was to be [37]. In the preceding centuries, when Athenians generally cremated their dead, the ashes of

31. See Jasper Griffin, "The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer," *JHS*, 97 (1977), 39–53.

32. See A. Parry, "Have We Homer's *Iliad*?" *Yale Classical Studies*, 20 (1966), 175–216. For an opposing view, see G. S. Kirk, *Homer and the Oral Tradition* (Cambridge, 1976), 129–45.

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37. Late Geometric I belly-handled amphora (1.55 m. high) by the Dipylon Master (Athens NM 804), around 750. Photo courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens.

women were buried in belly-handled amphorae [24].[33] Now, when inhumation had become the preferred form of burial, the remains of women rested beneath such amphorae rather than in them. There is no way of knowing whether the aristocrat who arranged the funeral provided the potter with any other specifications concerning size or decoration; he would, perhaps, have been a rare patron if he did not. At all events, although large vases had marked graves before, no earlier Greek potter had ever undertaken a task so monumental as this. He began by throwing prepared clay on his wheel and directed the rising, spreading form as an apprentice spun the wheel by hand. The vase was actually too large to be thrown all at once, so the potter made it in sections. That task done, he literally built the vase, binding the parts together with a clay slip, carefully smoothing the seams. He left undisguised the sharp angle where the swelling egg-shaped body meets the cylindrical, slightly flaring neck. The finished product stood just over five feet tall (1.55m)—the scale of a human being—and it was constructed according to a precise proportional scheme: it is twice as tall as it is wide, the neck is half the height of the body. The master potter lastly added two double-looping handles and set the monument aside to dry and stiffen. Then he turned master draftsman and, with a fine solution of clay and water that would turn dark only after the vase was fired, began to paint.

A lot had happened in Attic vase painting since the Middle Geometric I mourner took her inconspicuous and independent place beyond the borders of a complex geometric world [29]. That first Attic human figure precipitated a mighty confrontation between the pictorial and the abstract, and in the following decades the pictorial slowly gained strength. During the Middle Geometric II period (800–760) figures were not only painted on vases but also engraved on the flat catch plates of gold brooches (fibulae). Counting these engravings, the Attic repertoire of images expanded to include horses, birds, deer (standing or grazing), a family of pigs, a goat, a lion, and ships (the vehicle of much Athenian prosperity in those years). But the crucial development in Middle Geometric II picture making was the final acknowledgment of the inherent attractions of the human form.

Human beings no longer appear alone: they are grouped with other human beings and the relationships between them begin to be described. That is, while the Middle Geometric I mourner and the nearby horse are merely forlorn abbreviations of human activity (in that case, a funeral), Middle Geometric II artists represent true "scenes." Broad-shouldered

33. The ashes of men were placed in neck-handled amphorae [27]; kraters [29] were also associated with male burials, probably because of their association with the male-dominated symposium.

men tame a horse with whip and reins.[34] Rubbery-limbed warriors fight on land and sea, defending and attacking beached ships: some hurl spears, some crouch and take aim with bows, some duel with swords, some fall and die [34]. Such scenes are often ambiguous in content and in the representation of space (some figures hover in midair), but they are surprisingly energetic and are thus early manifestations of the characteristically Attic impulse for dynamic narrative. They also record the kinds of action that undoubtedly won Athenian aristocrats considerable glory in the early eighth century and that made them more like the heroes epic poets were singing about. One battle completely girds the belly of a monumental krater in New York—the *mnēma* of a nobleman who died around 770—and it may stand for ("illustrate" would be the wrong word) a glorious episode in the life of the deceased or even the occasion of his death [38].[35] On a decorative band above, in the middle of the handle zone, there is a badly damaged representation of a *prothesis* (the highly patterned ritual that included the lying in state of the corpse), the first of hundreds in Geometric art. A mourner kneels atop the funerary couch at the feet of the dead. Below the bier is a file of birds and lower still, in a separate register, are five mourners. There are more figures below the handles of the vase: this is the large, aggrieved company that the Middle Geometric I mourner [30] had to suggest all by herself. In fact, these figures look like her direct descendants: their arms curl over their heads, their contours are fluid and fleshy. But unlike her, the Middle Geometric II figures have passed from the edge of the abstract labyrinth to its very center. They have acquired a frame, a secure place, and have been brought within the ordered Geometric world. With that move the Dark Age of Greek art came to an end. The human figure never gave up the center again.

And yet there was a problem. If the Attic vase painter had concluded that the future lay in pictures, he was not yet clear how (or whether) to integrate them with their abstract environment. The painter of the cup from Eleusis [34] skirted the issue almost entirely: he surrounded his battles with solid black glaze, not geometric ornament. On the New York krater [38] the issue is addressed but not completely resolved: the *prothesis* panel seems like a light hole rent in the abstract fabric, and the picture thus threatens the integrity of the surface. The vase painter had two choices now: either he could give the surface over to the pictorial once and for all and make mere borders of geometric designs or, more conservatively, he

34. Kerameikos 2159; see K. Kübler, *Kerameikos*, V.i (Berlin, 1954), pl. 111.

35. It must be pointed out that no figure in the battle scene is emphasized by size or action: it is fair for us to think only that the deceased aristocrat participated in combats *like* this one, not to try to identify him in the scene, or even the scene itself.

38. Middle Geometric II krater (Metropolitan Museum 34.11.2), around 770. Photo courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1934.

could minimize the inherent (and unfair) competition between the pictorial and the abstract by making the human figure into another geometric motif and transforming the representation into half-abstract pattern. Ultimately, Greek artists made the first choice. But the master potter and painter who received that special aristocratic commission around 760–50 made the second. With the great vase he constructed and decorated—Athens 804, as it is known [37]—the Late Geometric style essentially began and Greek art acquired its first recognizable personality: the Dipylon Master.

Leaving representation aside for the moment, the history of Geometric vase painting had consisted of balancing rigid organization with the gradual expansion of decorative zones. Athens 804 is the monumental culmination of the process: it is covered with ornament from its top nearly to its

(reconstructed) bottom. At first glance, the surface is a bewildering display of abstract motifs. In fact, the motifs are traditional and the surface is controlled by visual rhythms and formulae.[36] The simplest formula is a band of three (sometimes two) thin horizontal lines: it is so common (on the front of the vase it appears nearly fifty times, if the vertical strips between the handles are counted) that it binds together the larger building blocks of the surface like geometric mortar (or, to mix metaphors, stitching). The triple-line band is combined with other patterns to form more complex formulae: the formula triple-line band/dotted lozenge frieze/triple-line band, for instance, occurs eleven times. This formula in turn frames single meanders and double meanders twice each. Still other formulae can be discerned in this fabric, which increases in complexity as it nears the handle zone of the vase—the most important zone—and then contracts again. It is clear that the surface is ordered through the elaborate, rhythmic repetition of distinct parts—that it is, in short, tectonically and formulaically composed.

This is one of several ways in which the Dipylon style and the Homeric style appear to be parallel. In both, the formula—not the single word, not the single brush stroke—is the basic compositional unit. The poet, using verbal blocks that can be as short as two words or as long as thirty-five lines (compare, for instance, *Iliad*, IX.122–57 and IX.264–99) but are all pressed into the rhythmic frame of the hexameter, is as much a builder of narrative surfaces as the vase painter is of decorative surfaces (and *tektōn epeōn*, "builder of words," is just how the Greeks could conceive of their poets).[37] The formula, oral or geometric, is both the tool and the stuff of the construction, and it lends to both monumental epic and monumental vase the qualities of stability and unity. For Homer's audience the formula was an aid to recognition: one use of a formula predicts or recalls other uses of the formula. Any line of oral poetry must have *seemed* familiar and equal, even if it was mostly new (similarly, whole episodes or tales can seem familiar because they make use of certain narrative themes or patterns). Formulaic language is highly resonant language, alluding constantly to itself. And thus the narrative moment, which is in fact fleeting, takes on the sturdy character of the regular, the constant, and the predictable. In a sense, the very language of Homer is its own meaning: it is the embodiment and validation of order itself.[38] And just as oral formulae and thematic patterns

36. For an analysis of the vase, see B. Andreae, "Zum Dekorationssystem der geometrischen Amphora 804 im Nationalmuseum Athen," in *Studies in Classical Art and Archaeology* (Locust Valley, N.Y., 1979), 1–16.

37. See M. L. West, "Greek Poetry, 2000–700 B.C.," *CQ*, n.s. 23 (1973), 179, and Nagy, *Best*, 300.

38. See J. Russo, "How, and What, Does Homer Communicate? The Medium and Message of Homeric Verse," in *Communication Arts in the Ancient World* (n. 25), 39–52.

guided the ear through the intricate texture of epic song, so the visual formulae employed by the Dipylon Master guide the spectator's eye over the huge surface of the amphora: one use of a motif echoes another and the additive surface coheres. In the geometric medium lies a message of order.

Figures that are treated formulaically become archetypes, schemata. The deer that graze and the goats that kneel on the neck of Athens 804 [37]—they take part in the first two continuous animal friezes in Archaic art (thousands more will follow)—are so treated. The animals in each frieze are identical. They are there, in fact, less as animals than as pattern, and they do not function differently from the bands of abstract ornament above and below (the goats, for instance, turn their heads back upon themselves, seeming to mimic the design of the meander). There is some variation among the thirty-nine human figures who inhabit the handle zone of the amphora—eight in a panel on the back, six under each handle, nineteen in the commanding *prothesis* on the front—but there is not much. In the *prothesis* [39], the limp-wristed corpse—she is at the exact center of the entire vase—and the two reclining women beneath her apparently wear gowns. A figure on a stool gestures with her hand. A child is a miniature adult. Two figures at the far left wear swords (and so they are men) and raise one arm in mourning. But the distinctions are minute: the Dipylon

39. *Prothesis* scene on the amphora shown in fig. 37. Photo courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens.

40. Detail of the amphora shown in fig. 37. Photo: Jeffrey M. Hurwit.

Master's mostly nude figures, male and female, on all seven of the vases attributed to him (nearly fifty more are assigned to other members of his shop) are essentially the same figure. The continuous, fleshy contours and irregular, relatively naturalistic proportions of earlier silhouettes [30, 34] have been rejected. Instead, the figure has been broken down into separate abstract shapes and, like the amphora itself, has been subjected to the ordering force of a proportional canon [40]. The head is a tiny circle with a large lump for a chin, but the height of the head and shaftlike neck together is one-half the height of the torso. The torso (shown frontally) is a tall and precise triangle precisely extrapolated by the muscleless sticks that serve for arms. The body is nearly cut in thirds at the waist (or at least at the spot where the waist should be) and at the knees: the distances between waist and knee and between knee and foot are virtually identical, and so are the curves of thigh and calf. All in all, the Dipylon silhouette, whose joints do not so much connect as exaggerate divisions, is the sum of distinct but mathematically related parts. It is structured according to a

1/2:1:1:1 ratio: the head (and neck) is one-seventh the height of the entire figure—a precociously Classical scheme. The unity of the figure is at any rate of a special sort: it is structural or tectonic, not organic, and the segment matters as much as the synthesis.

In this respect the Dipylon and Homeric conceptions of the human form may be cognate. Long ago, Bruno Snell argued that Homer has no one word for the body (or the mind or the soul) of a living person—one has a body (*sōma*) only when one is dead—and that Homer could thus have had no notion of the body (or the mind or the soul) as a whole.[39] Physically the Homeric human being is, Snell argued, as much a composite of head, chest, and limbs as a Dipylon silhouette: thus Akhilleus can say "my arms" have fought when he means "I" (*Iliad*, I.166). Emotionally and intellectually, too, Snell's Homeric human is an aggregate of distinct "organs": thus Odysseus can talk to his own *thymos*, that part of his soul concerned with temper and emotion, as if it were outside of him (*Iliad*, XI.403–10). Snell's thesis is not perfect: he does not say why a corpse can have (or be) a "body" but a living person cannot, and there are apparently a few exceptions to the rule in any case. It is also true that not all Late Geometric artists present so schematic and tectonic a view of the human form as the Dipylon Master: though their medium undoubtedly had something to do with it, the makers of bronze statuettes could create particularly rubbery and inarticulate figures [41] that have little to do with the Dipylon aesthetic. Nonetheless, the Dipylon Master and Homer—the greatest artist and the greatest poet of their age—both generally conceived of the human form in pieces and as pieces.

The Dipylon figure—a formulaic attachment of part to part—conveys information. It tells what makes up a human being. It tells what all human beings are like by eliminating (or ignoring) the peculiarities of individual members of the species. The Dipylon figure, in other words, expresses what is constant about the human form, not what is fleeting; what is essential, not what is idiosyncratic. Human beings are as changeable and as transient as the leaves Homer compares them to (*Iliad*, VI.146–49, XXI.464–66), but the *idea* of a human being—a creature with a blob for a head, a triangle for a chest, two legs, and two arms—is not. And it is a similar yearning for the essential, a similar impulse for the archetypal, that is expressed by the Homeric epithet—a descriptive word (or two) that helps fill out the hexameter line like an ornament but that also establishes

39. See Bruno Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geistes* (Hamburg, 1948), published in English as *The Discovery of the Mind*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), chap. 1. For criticisms, see Austin, *Archery*, 82–84, and R. Renehan, "The Meaning of ΣΩΜΑ in Homer," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, 12 (1981), 269–82. See also J. Russo and B. Simon, "Homeric Psychology and the Oral Epic Tradition," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 29 (1968), 483–98.

41. Bronze statuette (Olympia B 24), late eighth century. Photo courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens.

what is constant and unchanging about a character or a thing. Dawn is early-born and rosy-fingered, ships are swift or black, women are white-armed, Hera is queenly and thus golden-throned even when she is lying down (*Iliad*, I.611), Akhilleus is swift-footed even when he is sitting still (XVI.5). Homer's characters, of course, differ from one another; the Dipylon Master's silhouettes differ hardly at all. Still, epithets regularly appended to names and objects help place them beyond the realm of change. The epithet-noun formula, like the formulae the Dipylon Master drew, seeks to exclude what is atypical and affirm what is permanent. Homeric diction and the Dipylon figured style share an abhorrence of the accidental and mutable.

A particular view of reality is shared besides. For the performing Homer, reality was whatever he was singing at the time, and his conception of reality—that is, his representation of it—was thus necessarily bound to his narrative medium and organizational methods. Two of his most important devices are symmetry and antithesis, devices that order because they arrange, enclose, and frame. The impulse for symmetry can be seen in a single line—for instance, the line that summarizes what it is to be a Homeric hero: *mythōn te rētēr' emenai prēktēra te ergōn* (*Iliad*, IX.443). The verse means "to be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds," but in the Greek "of words" (*mythōn*) at the beginning of the line is balanced by "of deeds" (*ergōn*) at the end, "speaker" (*rētēr'*) is balanced by "doer" (*prēktēra*), and "to be" (*emenai*) occupies dead center. This kind of symmetry, in which the order of words in parallel clauses is inverted, is known as *chiasmos*, and the

same antithetical (and mnemonic) principle governs whole passages as well. When in the underworld Odysseus asks the shade of his mother a series of questions about her death and the situation back home on Ithaka, she answers them in reverse order, last question first (*Odyssey*, XI.171–203). The *Iliad* itself, in fact, is framed by a vast *chiasmos*. Book I begins with a nine-day-long plague and mass burials and continues with Akhilleus' quarrel with Agamemnon, Thetis' visits to Akhilleus and Zeus, and finally an argument among the gods. Book XXIV begins with an argument among the gods and continues with Thetis' visits to Zeus and Akhilleus, the reconciliation between Akhilleus and Priam (antithetical to the quarrel with Agamemnon in Book I), and finally a nine-day-long truce for Hektor's burial. The principles of antithesis and symmetry have seemed so pervasive and authoritative to some scholars that they consider the *Iliad* the poetic equivalent of a Late Geometric amphora, designed with as much concern for abstract form as, say, the surface of Athens 804.[40] To say that every episode, every narrative part, is precisely balanced by another is to go too far: the "geometry" of the *Iliad* is not so pure. But there *are* plenty of symmetries and patterns to be found. This symmetry, together with the strong and gratifying sense that the epic finishes what it starts (its sense of closure),[41] is as much a manifestation of order as the formula itself, and it is as much a manifestation of order as the tightly organized works of the finest Late Geometric vase painter—or the Shield of Akhilleus. Homer may never have seen a vase of the quality of a Dipylon amphora. The Dipylon Master may never have heard Homer's *Iliad*. But there is nothing unreasonable about looking at, say, the Dipylon Master's *prothesis* (where mourners balance each other around the central bier and neatly fill their rectangular panel, holding their arms exactly parallel to the upper border) and detecting analogous impulses for symmetry and closure. Whether expressed in words or in images, these impulses are symptoms of a larger Late Geometric mentality that revered stability and finality—the values of order—and that perfected poetic and artistic structures to control the world and put its parts in their places.

The parts are generally set side by side. Perhaps even more fundamental to the Homeric and Late Geometric representations of reality than symmetry is parataxis, a style in which sentences, ideas, episodes, or figures are placed one after the other like beads on a string.[42] In paratactic narrative,

40. See above all Cedric Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), chap. 11. For a criticism of this approach, see Kirk (n. 23), 261–63.

41. There is no such satisfaction at the end of the *Odyssey*, which is abrupt and by comparison artificial: it simply stops. In a sense, the *Odyssey* is open-ended while the *Iliad* is closed: it could, we feel, continue on more easily. In this respect, the *Odyssey*, which makes use of symmetry and antithesis but is less dependent on them, may anticipate a breakdown of the Late Geometric mentality and the rise of the freer forms of seventh-century art; see Whitman (n. 40), chap. 12.

42. See J. A. Notopoulos, "Parataxis in Homer," *TAPA*, 80, (1949), 1–23.

every idea, every scene seems independent and equal to every other—equally important, equally emphasized—and thus all seem to exist on one uniform level or plane. The planar quality of the Homeric style is particularly evident in so-called digressions, long (but hardly irrelevant) passages that interrupt the narrative and occupy the listener so completely that the matter at hand is momentarily lost.[43] Digressions typically occur at times of tension or high drama—for instance, in the heat of battle, where a charge of chariots can be stopped by a long genealogy (*Iliad*, VI.145–211), or where a simile used to describe a bloody wound becomes a thing apart, and the wound is for a few lines forgotten (*Iliad*, IV.141–45). The most famous digression is the tale of Odysseus' scar in Book XIX of the *Odyssey*. Penelope has told the old nurse Eurykleia to wash Odysseus' feet (he is in disguise). She uncovers his leg, touches his scar, and at once recognizes her master. But her reaction is delayed for more than seventy lines while Homer tells how Odysseus got his name and how he got the scar in a boar hunt on Mount Parnassos (ll. 393–466). Only after the digression does Eurykleia finally drop her master's leg into the washbasin and exclaim, "You are Odysseus!"[44] As Erich Auerbach has argued, this and other digressions are not there to relieve tension but to elucidate. They are characteristic of the Homeric impulse to leave nothing obscure: if Odysseus has a scar, the reason for it must be explained.[45] Past events and experiences, even motivation and thought processes, are clearly expressed or externalized (cf. *Iliad*, XI.403–10). All phenomena are thrust forward to the narrative surface—to the foreground—where they receive even, objective illumination. No hidden depths exist; nothing is omitted, vague, or darkly imaginable. There is, we may say, no perspective in the style of narrative Auerbach has identified[46]—nothing that is subordinate, nothing that does not exist on the front plane of the epic. And this paratactic presentation of everything, everyone, and every thought was undoubtedly conditioned by the nature of oral performance, where there was only the sound of the words, where each hexameter, once heard, was gone and replaced by another of equal grammatical and semantic value. Homeric reality was in effect the narrative moment—a flat, continuous present.

Parataxis and the plane control Late Geometric artistic representations of reality as well. Like each excessively jointed Dipylon silhouette—Paratactic

43. See Norman Austin, "The Function of Digressions in the *Iliad*," *GRBS*, 7 (1966), 295–312.

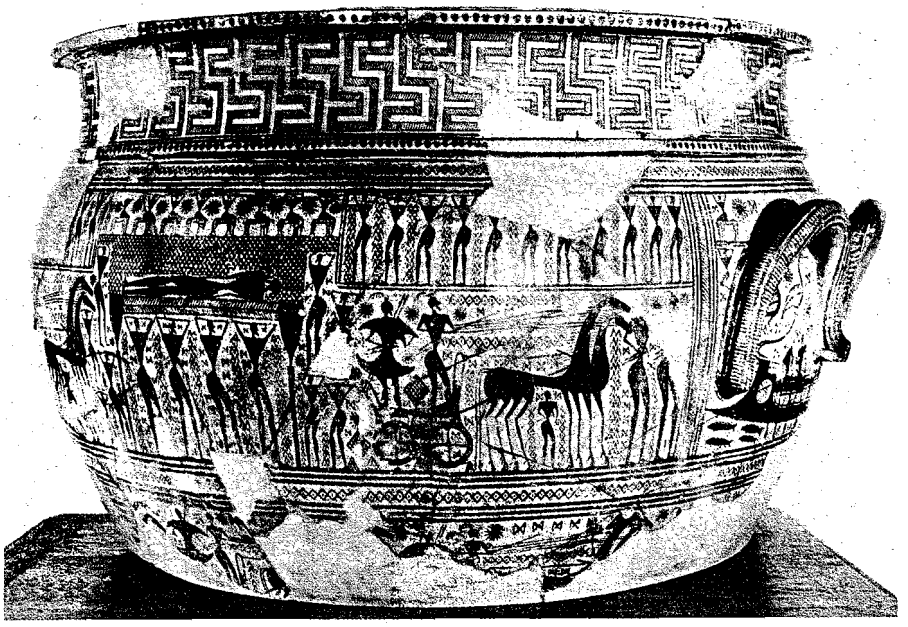
44. The episode is also an excellent example of "ring composition," in which a speech, scene, or digression is framed at beginning and end by a repetition of formulaic words—in this case, "she recognized the scar." Ring composition, like symmetry and antithesis, is a common Homeric method of shaping and enclosing.

45. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, 1952), 3–23.

46. Austin (n. 43) has discerned another, more elliptical or oblique style in Homer, but its existence does not seriously weaken the predominantly paratactic narrative.

Man if there ever was one—the entire *prothesis* on Athens 804 is a flat alignment of parts. It consists, first, of distinct groups of figures—those to the left of the bier, those to the right, and those below—but each figure is in fact independent, set off from its neighbor by vertical stacks of zigzags. This so-called filling ornament—something that was substantially missing in earlier scenes [38]—blends the picture with the abstract fabric beyond its borders: it is stitching, and it reduces the harshness of what would otherwise have been an airy, light patch suspended in a dense geometric tapestry. But this is not all that the filler does: it also assigns each mourner a separate and equal place on the surface of the vase. Each figure is clearly framed: overlapping of figures is strictly prohibited because it would obscure the contours of the silhouettes and cause visual confusion. Even the dead noblewoman is completely visible: the checkered shroud that in reality covered her is apparently held above, and it is cut back so as not to muddle her outline—it is almost as if we are allowed to see through the cloth rather than peek beneath it. The Late Geometric representation of reality aims for clarity, comprehension, and objectivity above all. The corpse is exposed because it is known to be there: to cover it up would be, somehow, dishonest or deceptive. The other figures are objectively equal: therefore they must be equally intelligible and therefore they must exist on the same plane, in the foreground. The mourners who in the painting antithetically flank the funeral couch in reality probably circled it in ritual lamentation. The dance, which would have obscured the bier as it passed in front and been obscured by the bier as it passed behind, has been cut in two and its halves have been stretched across the surface to form, paratactically, two human colonnades. Similarly, mourners did not really sit beneath the bier but in front of it, yet they are made to inhabit the same plane as the corpse and the standing mourners. Even when the Dipylon Master populated a much larger pictorial field with a much larger cast, we see the same flattening of space, the same projection of parts onto the regular, front plane. The row of mourners who sit, impossibly, atop the shroud of the deceased on a fragmentary krater in the Louvre [42] actually sat behind the bier, and the bier was really behind the tall mourners who stand comfortably under it. The four smaller mourners who seem to stand precariously on top of each other on either side of the bier are not really circus acrobats: the ones on top are to be thought of as standing behind those on the bottom. The rule that what is above was in fact behind is loose, but it is one of the very few in Late Geometric art,[47] and it was formulated because no distance or depth, no perspective, could be allowed to intrude into—and thus weaken—the Late Geometric conception of reality. Nothing (or

47. For other Geometric "laws" of representation, see S. Brunnsåker, "The Pithecusan Shipwreck," *Opuscula Romana*, 4 (1962), 165–242, and G. Ahlberg, *Prothesis and Ekphora in Greek Geometric Art* (Göteborg, 1971), 268–80.



42. Fragmentary Late Geometric I krater by the Dipylon Master (Louvre A 517). Photo: M. Chuzeville, by permission of the Musée du Louvre.

almost nothing) can be hidden or implicit. Geometric space, like the Homeric representation of reality, essentially consists of a uniformly illuminated foreground. The picture plane does not merely *contain* a representation of reality, it is the *equivalent* of reality.

A painted vase, no matter how fine, large, or intricately decorated, is not an epic poem. A sparse *prothesis* cannot compare with the rich, tragic complexity of the *Iliad*. A schematic silhouette cannot possess the mighty character and depth of an Akhilleus. The Dipylon Master did not attempt to compete with Homer or reproduce the *Iliad* in clay and glaze, and parallels between Homer and other Late Geometric artists do not hold so well.[48] Yet it is stranger to treat Homeric epic and the Dipylon style in total isolation than it is to see in them a rare spectacle of unity. In their delight in sheer size, in their tightly controlled use of formulae to construct monumental, highly patterned, and well-proportioned edifices, in their use of archetypes to counter the multiplicity and mutability of things, in their conception of the body as a summary of parts, in their dependence on symmetry and antithesis as means of arranging the world, in their power-

48. One Late Geometric Argive vase painter, for example, is remarkably successful in representing landscape and even recession into the distance, though all the elements of his picture are still evenly distributed over the surface of the vase; see J. Boardman, "Symbol and Story in Geometric Art," in Moon, figs. 2.4a and 2.4b and p. 19.

43. Seal impression on a vase found on Ischia (Pithekoussai), late eighth century. Drawing after J. N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece* (New York, 1977), fig. 75d.

ful sense of closure, and in their paratactic projection (or refraction) of reality upon the flat plane of the foreground, the Dipylon style and Homeric narrative are related manifestations of the subliminal impulses, the ordered sensibility, of the culture of mid-eighth-century Greece—a culture that after the final dissipation of the Dark Age sought through both its art and its poetry to reinforce its beliefs and confirm its rigorous vision of the world.

## Lions and Heroes: The Origins of Narrative

So much for the zeitgeist. Can anything more material, more palpable, be found to link Homeric epic and Late Geometric art? Specifically, did the circulation (however that is to be imagined) of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in the late eighth century affect the content of Greek art and transform the very nature and purposes of representation? Did epic—despite W. H. Auden's famous lament that "poetry makes nothing happen"[49]—make something revolutionary happen indeed?

What happened was the appearance, in the last third of the century, of one to two dozen vase paintings, engravings on fibulae and seals, and bronzes that can be interpreted as depictions of legendary events (e.g., Ajax carrying Akhilleus' corpse from the Trojan plain [43] and the struggle between Herakles and Apollo over the Delphic tripod [44]), portrayals of mythological characters (e.g., the Siamese-twin sons of Aktor [45, 48]), and even illustrations of Homer (e.g., *Odyssey*, XII.415–25 [46]). The representations that are open to such readings belong to a different category from

49. "In Memory of W. B. Yeats."