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Manliness, Violation, and Laughter: Rereading the Space and Context of the Eurymedon Vase

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The focus of this short study is a well-known and much discussed object: a red-figured type VII *oinochoe*, dated to the mid-460s BC and attributed (perhaps) to the Triptolemos Painter, or certainly to his circle. Since Konrad Schauenburg's 1975 publication of the artefact, it has been known as the 'Eurymedon Vase.'² It has rightly been classified as 'unique' by Amy Smith and although it is beyond the scope of this study to spend too much space re-rehearsing the scholarship on the vase in any detail, a general overview might prove profitable for what follows bellow.³ I will go on to discuss the representations of dress and the body found on the vase, as well as stance and gesture of the figures, and the spatial alignment of the vase before offering, hopefully, some fresh interpretations of the over-all message of the vase itself.

The body of the small vessel is decorated by a maeander-band which frames the two male protagonists placed on each side of the vase with, it would seem, the furthest possible distance separating them. To the right of the handle, a man advances forward, naked but for an undecorated rectangular cloak hanging down his back, thus leaving his torso and striding legs completely visible (Figure 1a). He sports a short scruffy beard and, most notably, grasps his erect penis in his right hand; his left arm is out-stretched and the fingers of his hand are reaching out. The extended arm seems to link, somehow, with the figure on the other side of the vase.

This figure, on the left side of the handle, (apparently) wears a skin-tight one-piece 'cat-suit', sparsely decorated with circles (Figure 1b). He wears a hat with long ear-flaps and has a full stringy beard and a thin wispy moustache. An empty bow-case hangs from his left arm; it gapes open. He stands awkwardly bent half-way over with his rump turned towards the advancing man. His torso twists uncomfortably forwards and his buttocks unnaturally contort and jut out to the side. His hands are raised, with palms open and fingers wide-spread, on either side of his face which, most notably, is depicted frontally – a feature that immediately alerts us to the fact that something strange is happening here, as acknowledged by Schauenburg and Gloria Pinney in the formative years of the vase's reception history.⁴

Some reception history

Schauenburg identified the two figures as a Greek (Figure A) and a Persian (Figure B). His identification of B as a Persian was based on the tight-fitting outfit which conceals his legs, arms, and torso, as well as the cap with ear-flaps, and the bow-case, all of which were typical

¹ I am grateful to the comments and helpful criticisms of Eran Almagor, Sandra Bingham, Barbara Borg, Nick Fisher, Sian Lewis, Alex McAuley, James Robson, and Jan Stronk.

² Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg inv. No. 1981.173; see Schauenburg 1975.

³ Smith 1999.

⁴ See Schauenburg 1975: 188 and Pinney 1984: 182.

insignia of the Persian in Attic vase-painting.⁵ Conversely, Figure A was identified as a Greek on the basis of his nudity. As is well known, a Greek inscription starting at the right of Figure A's face and ending at Figure B's feet reads EYPYMEΔON EIMI KYBAAE EΣTEKA: 'I am Eurymedon, I stand bent over' and the words are often ascribed solely to Figure B. Amy Smith's interpretation works better, however, and her notion is that the words actually form a dialogue: Figure A utters the line, 'I am Eurymedon'; the Persian, Figure B, then chimes in with, 'I stand bent over'. His is bad Greek, by the way, of the same kind of a pidgin-language often given to foreign characters in Attic comedy and Smith has gone so far as to suggest that the vase has the essence of comic drama about it: 'the painter may have been inspired by theatrical performances where... sexual humour was commonplace'.⁶ In fact, James Robson notes that in Old Comedy rape, 'is often presented in a celebratory light... an assertion of male power and of youthful vigour'.⁷

From the formative period of the vase's reception, there has been a trend to identify the composition as a direct reference to the Athenian victory over Persian land and naval forces at the battle of the river Eurymedon in Asia Minor in 467 or 466 BC (the precise dating of the event is notoriously difficult to pin down).⁸ In keeping with this, the action on the vase is read as an example of sexual domination in war, the Persian taking on the role of the humiliated loser of the battle.⁹ In Kenneth Dover's famous reading, the vase articulates a jingoistic Athenian victory: 'We've buggered the Persians!'¹⁰ The majority of subsequent scholarly treatments have followed this interpretation on most or all points.¹¹ The notable exception is Gloria Pinney's reading which dates the vase to 470 BC – therefore pre-battle – and reads the figure of Eurymedon not as a personification of military victory but as mythological character. This has not been well supported in scholarship and I will not pursue this route further. I think that any comment made on the internal working or external affairs of the Athenian polis was political, and I am broadly content to follow Dover's reading of the vase-scene; it is essentially correct – but there are further nuances to take into account.

Of course other variations on the reading of the vase have been propounded: James Davidson, for instance, rejects the belief that anal penetration was an expression of sexual dominance to the Greeks nor does he believe that anal penetration was humiliating and therefore sexual dominance (even in war) cannot be read into this scene.¹² He further points out that *if* sexual and military domination was the meaning of the vase, then it would most effectively have been shown by depicting the act of anal penetration itself. For Davison the vase portrays the Persian as a *katapugos* or *kinaidos*, a willing recipient for buggery, who adopts the *kubda* stance – 'the three-obol position at the bottom-end of a prostitute's price-range.' This is, argues Davidson persuasively, an outdoor 'knee-trembler'.¹³ The vase emphasizes that the Persian is sexually incontinent rather than sexually dominated or defeated: 'it is his...evident

⁵ Schauenburg 1975: 116-17.

⁶ Smith 1999: 141.

⁷ Robson 2014: 108. On Persians in Attic comedy see Miller 1991.

⁸ Schauenburg 1975: 103-04; on the dating of the battle see comments in Miller 1997: 12-3, 38-9; cf. the physical image in Plut. *Cim.* 12.1 and 13.3.

⁹ Schauenburg 1975: 120.

¹⁰ Dover 1978: 105.

¹¹ See Dover 1978: 105; Keuls 1985: 293. See further Shapiro 1992: 32; Hall 1993: 111; Kilmer 1993: 22, 107-8 and 1997: 135-38; Arafat 1997: 101-4; Miller 1997:13 and 2010: 304-38; Sparkes 1997: 144; Smith 1999: 138-39; McNiven 2000: 88-9; Ivantchick 2006: 249-252; Cohen 2011, 465-490.

¹² Davidson 1997: 169-71, 180-82.

¹³ *Ibid.*: 170.

nymphomania that makes him womanish'. At best, and paraphrasing Dover, Davidson asserts that the most the vase can claim is, 'we have high hopes of buggering the Persians'.¹⁴ Martin Kilmer has argued for an obvious military reading of the vase and suggests that the naked Greek is holding his penis as a weapon of war.¹⁵ The four-finger grip, it is argued, is similar to the way a soldier would hold a spear and it is, in Kilmer's words, not required for 'practical guidance'. There seems to be a case, certainly, for regarding the scene as an analogue for battle, especially since the vase-painter has taken pains to depict the other figure as an archer – the archetypal Persian foe. Therefore Karim Arafat states that, 'the pursuit is the battle... the rape is the victory'.¹⁶ Of course, given the nexus between battle and the hunt, some scholars see the scene as essentially an image of hunter and prey. All of these interpretations work for me. The essence of conquest/pursuit and humiliation/capture is inherent in the scene. But what else can be teased out of this provocative image? Much, I think, but only if we start to re-examine ideas of the vase's iconographic composition.

Iconography 1: dress as an identifier

Pinney rightly points to the difficulty of distinguishing between Persians and Scythians in Attic vase-painting and this is certainly the case with Figure B on the Eurymedon vase. While the elements of his costume are certainly not incongruous with his identification as a Scythian (as advanced by Vos in the 1960s, when there was a clear vogue for reading Scythians into almost every foreign figure in Attic art), they are equally appropriate items of costume for the depiction of a Persian.¹⁷ At best, the costume of this figure can certainly be termed 'Oriental', and could as such be either Persian or Scythian, or for that matter a Median, Amazonian, or Hyperborean. It is not reasonable to expect, as Pinney does, that the vase-painter should have been more specific in his use of national identifiers in order to allude to a specific battle fought against the Persians. That was not the concern of the Attic artists creating impressions of 'foreign peoples' and the depiction of eastern costume (a word I use deliberately to contrast with 'dress') had been vacillating, shifting, and changing in the half century or so since the Oriental first entered into the Attic artistic repertoire c. 520 BC.¹⁸ A standard fantastical oriental costume, typical in Attic art of this period, is created on the Eurymedon vase; the bent-over Figure B reads 'Persian' in the most generic sense of the word as the painter nods to a personification of the Persian Empire *en masse*.¹⁹

Any concern scholars have shown over the dress of Figure A, however, is, in my view, unwarranted. Except for his mantle, he is depicted in keeping with the Greek ideal of 'heroic nudity'. Some have maintained that he is not a Greek at all though, but a Thracian and as a Thracian he wears not a woven cloak but an animal skin knotted at the throat.²⁰ This, it must be stressed, is certainly not the case. Figure A does not wear a pelt and the supposed 'claws' attached to the knot is actually the salvage edge of the woven cloth – a type of fringe on the edge of the garment. When the Greeks wanted to show animal skin garments, they did so

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 171.

¹⁵ For the connection between the hunt and battle see Barringer 2001: 10-69. For the penis used as a weapon see Kilmer 1993: 107-08, 128-29

¹⁶ Arafat 1997: 103.

¹⁷ Vos 1963: 44-45.

¹⁸ See, for instance, the earliest known image of a king or satrap on a black-figure neck-amphora: Florence, Museo Archeologico 3845; Shapiro 2009: 59, fig. 3.1; Ivantchick 2006: 228.

¹⁹ See further Miller 2010: 316.

²⁰ Wannagat 2001: 51-71.

deliberately by retaining the shape of the pelt which often has claws and paws still attached; this is clearly not the case here.²¹

Margaret Millar has rightly questioned the social standing of the semi-naked Greek, though, and suggests that what we have depicted on the vase is a hoplite – a soldier-lad from the lower-classes - wearing a short knotted *exomis* (cloak) familiarly seen on figures of labourers, herdsmen, and other manual workers where it can be worn around the waist or worn over one shoulder and was possibly a standard ‘second-hand’ garment, created from an old cut-down *peplos*, *himation* or *chitōn*.²² Millar’s is a good observation and the idea of his common status is emphasized by his scruffy little beard and unshaved cheeks.²³ The Greek’s nudity acts as a costume which, as Larissa Bonfante has shown, dresses him as a hero.²⁴ Consequently, what we see here is an unkempt, decidedly unheroic hoplite - a typical GI Joe - whose depiction is deliberately blurred through the incongruous use of artistic heroic nudity. It is the artist’s playful nudge at the naked heroic enshrinement of a very ordinary, unkempt, soldier.

The nude/dressed binary is, clearly, the essence of the vase’s imagery. The Persian’s figure-hugging cat-suit, even though it is a garment of the artistic imagination (if nonetheless based on the real Persian mode of wearing sleeved tunics and long trousers), has the effect of displaying the body beneath it. Constructed like a modern-day wetsuit (a making technique quite beyond the capabilities or requirements of antiquity) this fantastical garment of the mind’s eye so completely covers the body that, in effect, the Persian’s body is exposed by it.²⁵ The fictitious garment dresses him as the humiliated enemy.

The fully-covered Persian body plays as a contrast to the heroic nakedness of the Greek. This is a theme explored in many other artefacts of this period, including an exquisite little perfume flask in which a fully-clothed Persian coquettishly twangs an arrow at a Greek warrior, naked but for his greaves and helmet.²⁶ The Persian cat-suit of the imagination clearly evoked pejorative associations in the Greek mind and an archer-figure in this garb can be found on the reverse side of an *ostrakon* bearing the inscription *Kallias Kratiou* – a political cartoon and a deliberate slur on the Medizing Kallias.²⁷ According to Herodotus, in the period before Marathon the anxious Greeks were appalled by the sight of Persian garb and it was the Athenians who, ‘were the first Greeks, that we know of, to meet the enemy at a run, and the first to endure seeing Persian dress and the men who wore it; until then even to

²¹ On uncut animal pelts as clothing see comments by Lee 2015: 120. For detailed images of animal skins as cloaks see a red-figure *hydria* in Boston, MFA 08.417 = Wannagat 2001: 65, fig. 10 and a *krater* in Boston, MFA 10.185 = Wannagat 2001: 70, fig. 12.

²² Miller 2010: 318-21; it is less likely to be a *tribōn*. See further Lee 2015: 112.

²³ Interesting observations on the bear are given by Wannagat 2001: 54-61.

²⁴ Bonfante 1989 and 1990.

²⁵ It must be acknowledged that the garment worn by Figure B is in no way a realistic portrayal of Persian (or other Eastern) dress. Recent attempts to recreate these types of garments from sprang – a stretch-woven wool-are unconvincing; for an attempt see Drinkler 2010. That these garments are based on Persian cavalry dress (see Llewellyn-Jones 2013: 62-63) cannot be doubted, but the artists are not creating facsimile portrayals of the Persian originals. In fact, they often fudge the area of most confusion to them: the groin. The question of how trousers were fastened and supported on the waist clearly baffled the Greeks and vase imagery only supports their puzzlement.

²⁶ Odessa, Museum of Western and Eastern Art, 26602 = Beazley 1963: fig. 7.5; see further an image of an idealised naked Greek confronting a clothed Persian archer on an *onoichoe* by the Chicago Painter = Miller 1997: fig. 110. Such images are fairly common in the period 467-60 BC.

²⁷ Athens, Kerameikos O 849. Discussion in Miller 1997: 252-3 and Wannagat 2001: 53, fig. 3 with discussion; Ivantchick 2006: 250.

hear the name “Persian” gave the Greeks cause for fear’.²⁸ Whether this was true or not, the costume of the vase’s Persian, whose threat has been terminated and ends in humiliation, is an integral part of the mockery in the image. Moreover, this Persian has lost his bow and arrows and all that remains of his weaponry is his empty bow-case. Its arrows shot and wasted, it is redundantly slung over his arm; its top flaps open, and stands, perhaps, as a playful visual metaphor for the military redundancy of the Persians in light of the Greek victory,²⁹ as well as a play-on-words created around the double entendre implicit in the words ΕΥΠΥΜΕΔΑΝ ΕΙΜΙ: ‘Gaping-arsed Mede’.³⁰ The hoplite, ‘armed’ with his erect penis, is clearly meant to form a visual contrast to the ‘disarmed’ Persian. So, dress and undress is a significant factor in interpreting the Eurymedon vase. It helps create the vivid depiction of the humiliation of the Persians following their defeat at the land-and-river-battle. But more can be done to read its nuances.

Iconography II: gesture-v-space

The reading of the gesture adopted by the humiliated Persian has long been a matter of puzzlement. Davidson maintains that this is a gesture of surrender – ‘Hands up, punk!’ – but this is to assume too much dependence on the idea that gesture and body language is shared across time and cultures, a legacy, perhaps, of Gerhard Neumann’s influential but flawed readings of body language in Greek vase paintings as ‘Gestern Des Lebens.’³¹ Nonetheless, Tim McNiven, in his important study of gesture in Greek art, plumps for an interpretation of surprise, shock, or fear, comparing the Persian’s gesture to that of Eurystheus trapped in the *pithos* and confronted by the wrathful Herakles in several well-known black- and red-figure scenes - although some images of this motif suggest that his arms are either wildly flaying about, or, perhaps more appropriately, raised in supplication, as might be expected given the dire circumstances of his predicament.³² Certainly upraised arms are common indicators for some such emotion as surprise, terror, or for the acts of supplication and entreaty. Alexandre Mitchel unusually opts for the Eurymedon vase’s Persian adopting an attitude of both surprise ‘and probably delight’.³³ Surrender, surprise, alarm, and even an anticipatory frisson, are therefore the most common scholarly interpretations of this supposed “real-life” gesture. For Askold Ivantchick the Persian has his ‘hands raised in a gesture of despair.’³⁴ Some even read the Persian’s body-language as a ‘feminine gesture’³⁵ (whatever that implies) or, intriguingly, of mocking disrespect on the part of the Persian: he, the recipient of an insult, performs a ritual motion - a kind of arm-flapping intended to mimic the movements of fighting cocks – in what Ada Cohen sees as a ‘*Geste* rather than a *Gebärde*, formal rather than reflective’.³⁶

²⁸ Hdt. 6. 112.

²⁹ The empty quiver is typical of the Greek vision of Persians: Hdt. 7.61; it denotes unmanliness.

³⁰ Discussion in Miller 2010: 337-8. It should be stressed that the name is spelled with an *o-mikron* and not an *o-mega* as it should be. The form *Euru-Medon* could be taken as a hint to εὐρύπρωκτος (LSJ: *wide-breeched*, i.e. *pathicus*, which suits one interpretation of the vase), and is known from Greek comedy: Ar. *Ach.* 716, 843; *Nub.* 1084, 1090, 1092; *Vesp.* 1070; *Thesm.* 200. The ‘Medon’ part of the name might insinuate the ‘Mede’ as a sort of double pun.

³¹ Davidson 1997: 170; Neumann 1965.

³² See McNiven 2000: 170; further observations by Mitchell 2012: 85 with n. 170 for details of the Eurystheus scenes.

³³ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁴ Ivantchick 2006: 249.

³⁵ Cartledge 1998: 57.

³⁶ Cohen 1993: 250-1. See also Cohen 2010: 168 where she talks of ‘a mocking, taunting gesture’.

Contrary to all opinion to date, I do not think that the Persian is performing a gesture of any kind and so attempting to look for a motivation on the Persian's part is a non-starter. My belief is that the artist is showing us, the viewers of the vase, that the Persian is bracing himself against the outer-edge of the pot. The Persian is leaning against the vase's invisible wall in a brace or frisk position and his hands, taking the weight of his body, are splayed open as they press up against the opaque exterior (Figure 2). The artist cleverly – and very skilfully – plays with the viewer's conception of the translucent outer rim of the vessel and with the three-dimensional space of the vase's interior.

We are already familiar with the idea that the shape of a painted vessel, especially the *tondo* of a cup, can be used to surprising and inventive effect to augment and emphasize the composition and the narrative drama of a scene. It is wonderfully expressed, for instance, in the *tondo* scene of a cup in Edinburgh by the Triptolemos Painter in which a defeated Persian is backed into the curve of the circular border; he is backed against a 'wall' (as it were) and is clearly losing the battle – a death blow looks immanent (Figure 3). It is the positioning of the sliding Persian, cornered against the shape of the cup, which gives the scene its drama and creates its essential narrative.³⁷ The Penthesilea Painter uses the same motif to create the final moments of battle too, as the twisted corpse of a frontally-facing Amazon collapses and slides into the circular field of the *tondo*.³⁸

Of more direct interest, though, is the famous scene of Achilles and Patroclus on a big *kylix* in Berlin by the Kleophrades Painter (the 'Sosias Cup') in which the wounded Patroclus uses the outer circle of the *tondo* to support his weight, as he pushes his foot against the painted rim, thereby creating a buttress to support his uplifted leg and to steady its hold; the edge of the *tondo*, it becomes clear, is conceived of as fixed and secure, and the scene is given its narrative through the use of this playful artistic conceit.³⁹ The tension in Patroclus' foot is palpable. This same visual effect is seen too in sex-scenes where the *tondo* 'walls' are used for support, anchorage, and leverage for legs, feet, furniture, and cushions in a wide variety of heterosexual coupling positions. It is no coincidence that a real master of this technique in the sex-scenes (and the scene of defeat on the Edinburgh cup) is the Triptolemos Painter, the possible creator of the Eurymedon vase, or certainly the acknowledged master of this artistic circle.⁴⁰

What is remarkable about the Eurymedon image, however, is the confident and very unexpected way the artist has turned the Persian's face, hands, and torso frontally so that he can play with the concept of the 'invisible' wall to create the same kind of buttressing effect seen in profile elsewhere (admittedly, the painter does not have the skill - or desire - to deal with the legs and buttocks of the Persian figure with the same degree of novelty and falls back on the well-established conventions of drawing the human figure side-on).

It must be conceded that the Persian is not the only figure to be given this front-on treatment in vase-painting. On a powerful, if little-known, fragment by the Kleophrades Painter (Figure 4) a masturbating satyr, aroused by the sight of a sleeping maenad (on another fragment) looks up so that his face is shown in sharp foreshortening from the beard up, as recognized by

³⁷ Edinburgh 1887.213; Roberston 1992: 113, fig. 112.

³⁸ *Ibid.*: 161, fig. 167; Munich 2689.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 59, fig. 46. Berlin, Staatliche Museen 2278.

⁴⁰ See for instance Tarquinia RC2983 and Robson 2014: 270, fig. 30; Kilmer 1993: figs. R506, R507, see further R529, R543, R545, R545.2.

Martin Robertson in his perceptive analysis of the artist's compositional method.⁴¹ However, he misses the fact that the satyr's splayed palm and the fingers of his upright arm means that he is pushing against the invisible 'front wall' of the vase. As he squats and masturbates and fantasises about the maenad, the satyr steadies his body by leaning into the outer rim of the vase in a stance that echoes that of the Persian on the Eurymedon vase.

When we recognize that the Persian is buttressed up against the vase's 'wall', then it becomes more straightforward to understand the twisted torso and unnatural stance of the Persian figure. The artist is trying to show that by adopting this brace or frisk position, his body projects back into the empty space of the physical structure of the vase. After all, a vase is a three-dimensional object containing two-dimensional scenes and as the vessel is rotated and manipulated, it forces the viewer to read the encoded messages. We are familiar with this. Less understood is the notion of the internal space of the vase. We must recall that the vacuum of the pot can have a presence too; it too is a space which can be read. If we were to imagine that every terracotta vase was made of transparent glass, then the imperative nature of the narrative or spatial potential of interior space becomes important. Some Attic artists play with this idea (although it must be conceded that this is not on the agenda of many).

A two-handled *pelike* from the circle of Euphronios (Euthymides or Oltos) depicting young athletes performing the *bibasis* - jumping with high back-kicks to the sound of an *aulos* - skilfully toys with this idea of narrative operating *within* the space of the vessel.⁴² The front view of the scene shows the boys in a mid-air jump (Figure 5a) but when the vase is revolved and viewed from the rear, the same two boys are depicted again (Figure 5b), in the almost same attitude (their arms are lowered), but this time in reverse, showing their buttocks and long tresses of hair as they are viewed from behind. The viewer is persuaded to project the image into the body of vase, and comes to the realization that this exercise regime takes place within the vacuum of the vase and that the internal structure of the vase is actually the performance space for the scene. The artist attempts to give a sense of three-dimensional depth to the picture and he toys with the viewers' spatial awareness.

Other artists attempt this technique too with varying degrees of success: the Niobid Painter's attempt to create a three-dimensional landscape-composition wherein extra depth is achieved by the fact that the arrows of Apollo and Artemis pierce through the rocks which pin Niobe's children to the ground, is well-known.⁴³ Less familiar is the scene of an Amazonomachy on a volute-krater by the Painter of the Woolly Satyrs in which a fallen Greek warrior is painted with vivid foreshortening whereby the sole of his foot presses up against the invisible 'wall' of the vase as if pressed against a pane of glass.⁴⁴ Like the Persian of the Eurymedon vase, this warrior connects his body to the outer rim of the vase and to the action within the body of the vessel.

With all of this in mind, it is vital to reconsider the positioning of the naked Greek in the composition of the Eurymedon vase too. If, as I argue, the action of the vase is determined by the use of its interior space and that the Persian braces himself against the outer rim and pushes his buttocks into the space of the interior of the vase, then the Greek cannot remain in a static position at the 'rear' of the pot, but must be brought into the narrative drama of the

⁴¹ Malibu, Paul J. Getty Museum 84.AE.188; Robertson 1992: 134, fig. 136.

⁴² Boston, MFA 1973.88.

⁴³ Paris, Louvre G 341 = Robertson 1992: 181, figs. 191 and 192.

⁴⁴ New York, MMA 07.286.84 = Robertson 1992: 182, fig. 193; see also Mertens 2010: 124.

scene at its centre. This becomes more apparent if we render the vase schematically (Figure 6a), but I do not think this goes far enough.

My problem lies with the outstretched arm and the open hand of the aggressor, which seems to be reaching out for something. This has caused some debate. It has been suggested that the Greek's gesture emphasizes the maritime aspect of the battle of Eurymedon and links it to a pose struck, for instance, by Athene who is sometimes shown carrying an *aphlaston*, a component of the ancient warship, in her outstretched hand.⁴⁵ This is an unnecessary complication. Better to regard this outstretched arm and hand as linking in some way to the bent-over figure of the Persian. Indeed, if we think about the three-dimensionality of the vase then in fact the Greek's arm reaches into the vase's interior space and his hand makes contact with the Persian's shoulder; his weapon-like penis, grasped by its base, is now in the correct place for penetration (Figure 6b).

Depictions of male-on-male penetration are exceptionally rare in Attic art and while they do exist,⁴⁶ it should be qualified that most show the moment prior to intercourse; this is how, conventionally, the Eurymedon scene has been regarded.⁴⁷ But this vase-painter is not behaving conventionally by any stretch of the imagination, and he deliberately toys with his craft in the creation of the scene. In a straightforward reading of the vase, as we have noted, this is a pursuit scene, with two protagonists separated on two sides of the vase. But a more sophisticated reading demands that we acknowledge the three-dimensionality of the object and place those protagonists together within the same space at the centre of the vase. Martin Kilmer has stressed that the Eurymedon vase is, 'the clearest exception to the apparent taboo [against depicting anal intercourse between two males]'.⁴⁸ I suggest that the taboo is not just challenged in this scene, it is shattered. Obliquely and craftily, the vase shows anal penetration.⁴⁹

Interpretation

The scene depicted on this extraordinary vase is a more emphatic depiction of sodomy than is usually thought, but how might the reinterpretation of space I have offered here affect the interpretation of the scene? It is possible, I think, to come up with two scenarios. In the first, the Persian is aggressively slammed up against the frame of the vase and brutally sodomized; this is an aggressive rape scenario. A second reading of the scene, though, can potentially offer more subtlety, as the narrative is not simply about the Greek sexual-military domination of the Asiatics – 'We buggered the Persians' – but more to do with the willing acquiescence of the Persian to surrender himself to Greek force. 'I stand bent over' is the Persian's willing proclamation of keen self-humiliation. Deliberately bending over and bracing himself against the vase's invisible wall, the Persian eagerly offers himself up to the Greek's sexual dominance. The message is clear: 'The Persians were gagging for it!'

⁴⁵ Miller 2010: 329-32.

⁴⁶ See Robson 2014: 253, fig. 10 and 44-5 for a discussion.

⁴⁷ Examples of explicit heterosexual scenes by the Triptolemos Painter are Tarquinia 3885 = Beazley 1963: 367.93 and Tarquinia 3886 = Beazley 1963: 367.94.

⁴⁸ Kilmer 1993: 22.

⁴⁹ It is possible, given the interpretation I advocate here, that the puzzling scene of a frontally represented male who is shown holding the buttocks of two young men on either side of him, could in fact be showing him penetrating them in succession. See Turin, Museo di Antichità 4117 = Blanshard 2015: 106, fig. 6.4.

James Davidson's suggestion then that the Persian figure is to be regarded as unrestrained in his sexual desire seems accurate to me. Unlike Davidson, however, I think that the vase nonetheless still encodes the theme of sexual domination and its imperative military association. The Persian invites defeat and humiliation because this is the natural order of things, as articulated in, for instance, the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters and Places*. The chorus of Aristophanes' *Wasps* claims that after the battle at Marathon, the barbarians were forced to admit that the Athenian warriors were naturally *andrikoteros*, 'braver' or (better) 'more manly' than they.⁵⁰ *Andrikos* is an appropriate term, implying both masculinity and valour in warfare and with his acquiescent, invitingly suggestive posture, the Persian is similarly acknowledging the Greek's masculine superiority. Given the fact that the Persian is armed only with his redundantly empty bow-case, this implies that the Greek is the obvious superior in warfare too.

In his 1998 article 'Violence, masculinity and the law in Classical Athens', Nick Fisher skilfully explored the nature of overt masculine aggression in Athenian society. He revealed Athens to be a 'seriously violent society', arguing that, 'despite the persistence of a strong ideological commitment that citizens should prove their manhood, maintain their honour and avoid shame..., much low-level fighting occurred.'⁵¹ In his analysis, Fisher utilized David Gilmore's anthropological model of male aggression in Andalusian society and in adjacent Mediterranean communities. It was noted by Gilmore that for the creation of a machismo culture, certain elements of ideologically propelled behaviour are fundamentally necessary: there must be, for instance, a clear view of the differences between male and female natures and abilities. Men in 'machismo societies' are under constant pressure to perform the 'macho' role publicly. Especially important in this regard is their ability to play sexually dominant roles within society and to rigorously avoid any slur of effeminacy.⁵² Indeed James Doyle's influential topology of masculinity stresses that above all else the primary rule for being a man is: Don't be female. For Doyle this is the 'negative touchstone' of men's role: whatever women do is, *ipso facto*, what a real man must not do. Doyle's second rule is: Be aggressive. Competitive values and military training reinforces this ideal. The third of Doyle's demands is: Be sexual. Men are supposed to be sexually experienced and to be always interested in sex – especially the act of penetration.⁵³ As Julia Wood puts it, '[penetrative] sex isn't a free choice when you have to perform to be a man'.⁵⁴

The rough-looking Greek squaddie on the Eurymedon Vase exemplifies the norms of a particular physiological identity of dominant maleness in Greek culture, even though the hoplite stretches the Athenian aesthetic ideal of the *jeunesse dorée* to its limits. For his part though, the Persian's submissive act of bending over – 'bottoms-up' – is an expression of his natural feminine servility, his unbridled nymphomania and, of course, his eagerness to be penetrated – a wanton display of the many weakness of his race.⁵⁵ And there is no doubt in

⁵⁰ Ar. *Vesp.* 1089-90.

⁵¹ Fisher 1998: 92.

⁵² Gilmore 1987 and 1990. This role-playing scenario is further endorsed by the need for men to engage in the competitions of masculinity as well as elaborate rites of passage, both witnessed in Athenian society.

⁵³ Doyle 1989: 18-30. See further Brittan 1989: 3 – 'Masculinity does not exist in isolation from femininity – it will always be an expression of the current image that men have of themselves in relation to women' (and one might say, of effeminate men).

⁵⁴ Wood 1994: 77.

⁵⁵ The stance of the Persian also plays on, I think, the Greek conception of the Persian act of *proskynesis*; see Llewellyn-Jones 2013: 71-2, 230. In a Near Eastern context, the Iranian practice of bowing and kissing as a sign of submission and respect looks very much at home since kow-towing, and prostration were familiar gestures in Persian social protocol, but the Greeks found the gesture incomprehensible. For them, kow-towing was a

my mind that the scene, with its play on the image of the extreme shamelessness of the barbarian, is meant to raise a laugh.

We must recall that our vase is a simple little common-or-garden wine jug. It was used, no doubt, at some kind of drinking party - maybe a soldier's get-together. The scene depicted on the jug may not be a sophisticated joke, but it is certainly effective visual humour. Davidson regards the vase as a gag on the viewer: bending over to see the inscription and reading it aloud, the viewer turns himself into the bent over Eurymedon, insatiable when it comes to wine and sex, much to the amusement of the rest of the party.⁵⁶ This is an odd interpretation. It seems unlikely that the Athenian viewer would identify himself with the Persian. I can imagine, though, the jug being passed around the drinkers, as the wine flows freely. As they begin to identify with the Greek personification of the battle, and eye-up his victory prize, then the dirty jokes begin to fly. The Persian is literally passed around the group from squaddie to squaddie and as each drinker handles the jug, he replays the drama of the scene: 'Now I am Euymedon', he boasts. 'Fuck me!' is the Persian's alacritous, insatiable, demand.⁵⁷ This is a visual representation of soldiers' humour. But we should bear in mind that the scene may have reflected a lived reality and that the post-battle rape of defeated soldiers has never been just a drinking-game fantasy.⁵⁸

Gloria Pinney has remarked that, 'sadism and patriotism are sometimes allies but seldom funny'.⁵⁹ Ada Cohen counters this by arguing eloquently and vividly for a long world-wide tradition of depicting sexual humiliation through humour.⁶⁰ Whether the Eurymedon scene is funny is, of course, highly subjective, but when I view this vase, I cannot get away from other more recent scenes of military aggression which have drawn on the same notions of sexual humiliation, domination, and soldier-humour. A decade ago around twenty photographs taken at the Abu Ghraib military compound in Iraq were leaked to the public (Figure 7; many others are still classified). To view these images with analytic dispassion is difficult, yet as Bruce Lincoln has stressed, 'to study the images shows that they deploy - in a fashion more blunt and obscene, and devoid of artistic niceties - the same basic codes of cultural dominance encased within the vase image we have been studying. In these small-scale tableaux the low-level GIs endlessly re-persuaded themselves of the basic truths: we are high, they are low; we are clean-they are dirty; we are brave, they are cowards; we hold the power; they are powerless'.⁶¹ It was Private First Class Lynndie England, the most notorious of the Abu Ghraib soldiers, who first offered an explanation of the act of depicting prisoners in such a way in the snap-shots. Her vulgar defence was, 'It was just for fun.' Special agent Tyler Pieron, who investigated the Abu Ghraib indignities, maintained that when asked why they

religious act and suitable only for performance before a god, so that for a Greek to do it before a man undermined the very concept of *eleutheria*, or 'freedom'; see Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.35.

⁵⁶ Davidson 1997: 182.

⁵⁷ More puns can be found, of course: Eurymedon is a fluid (a river), like wine, that is about to fill the cups of the symposiasts and as the vessel is tilted and rotated, the Persian is 'filled'.

⁵⁸ Penn 2016: 'Sexual assault is alarmingly common in the U.S. military, and more than half of the victims are men. According to the Pentagon, 38 military men are sexually assaulted every single day. These are the stories you never hear—because the culprits almost always go free, the survivors rarely speak'. See further comments, on the notion of male rape in antiquity, by Cohen 2010: 169-70, 181-86. In Athens, of course, rape was used as a punishment; see Ar. *Thes.* 59-62.

⁵⁹ Pinney 1984: 182.

⁶⁰ Cohen 2011: 470-73 and 2010: 168-69.

⁶¹ Lincoln 2007: 97.

had humiliated prisoners in such a way, the soldiers who perpetrated the acts answered simply, 'because we can'.⁶²

'Because we can' reads as an expression of the Athenian zeitgeist propounded in this common little wine jug we know grandly as 'the Eurymedon vase'. For this reason alone we might well ask why an Athenian, be he a low-class soldier or an elite symposiast, would not find the sexual violation and humiliation of the enemy funny; the Eurymedon vase is a well-aimed joke on recent unexpected but fortuitous political and military events which demonstrate, yet again, the natural superiority of the Athenians. Why would this image not find its way into Athenian popular culture? The Eurymedon vase helped to increase low-level military morale and to vent the fear – the terror even – that the Greeks had felt during Xerxes' invasion. Similar feelings can also help explain the creation of the Abu Ghraib snapshots. The Eurymedon and Abu Ghraib images empower troops to continue to slaughter, injure, demean, and commit the random atrocities on which all empire-building depends. The sign which demonstrates that the operation has been successful is reflected by an arrogant posture, but be it a jubilant 'thumbs up' of a grinning GI or a confident grip of the penis by a scruffy unshaved hoplite, the meaning is unchanged.

⁶² *Ibid.*

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