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ODYSSEUS IN VISUAL PROGRAMS

L. Bouke van der Meer

*Images of Odysseus in ancient visual arts have been published by Odette Touchefeu-Meynier in her monograph *Thèmes odysseens* (1968) and in *LIMC* (1992). However, she did not pay attention to the meaning of Odysseus's actions in visual programs (*Bildprogramme*). Therefore, this paper tries to explain the meaning of syntagmatic and paradigmatic programs. A syntagmatic relation between scenes on one or two sides of a vase, or another artefact or monument, is represented by successive scenes from a same story (Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999: 118, 136-137; Mišcicki 2015: 75-81), in our case by different actions of Odysseus or different Odyssean stories. It will be shown that some of these syntagmata have a paradigmatic meaning. A paradigmatic relation depicts an action of Odysseus with the extension of a non-Odyssean, thematically related, mythical or real life picture. An observer may note similarities between the images by repeated compositions and motifs (Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999: 118, 122-136; Steiner 2007: 129-170; Meyer 2009: 26-28). Visual paradigms containing a comparison or common ground idea in the eyes of the artist and viewer occur during more than thousand years as will be shown in the following case studies. They illustrate how Odysseus's actions were variously interpreted in the course of time.*

The earliest programs

The earliest paradigmatic program dates from around 670-660 BC. The neck of the well-known Protoattic amphora from Eleusis (Simon 1981: 41-42) depicts The Blinding of Polyphemos, and the belly shows Perseus, protected by Athena, fleeing for two Gorgones after having decapitated the only mortal one, Médousa (Giuliani 2003: 96-114; Grethlein 2015: 204-205; 2017: 213-218). Between these scenes we see a lion about to attack a boar. The amphora was a funerary vase. Its bottom was removed in order to receive the corpse of a young boy. This means that, originally, the amphora was not made for a boy but for a male adult. Evidently, Odysseus and Perseus were role models for the Attic elite. They were men of *aretè* (courage). A second paradigmatic link is that both heroes delete the eye of a dangerous adversary, using their *mètis* (ruse, cleverness). Curiously, Odysseus is painted white instead of dark. This reminds us of the Homeric epithet *phaidimos* (shining, glorious; cf. *Odyssey* 10.251: *phaidim'Odysseus*). Some scholars hold that the lion should be compared with Odysseus in view of their white colour. In my view, however, the lion reminds us of a passage in the *Odyssey* (9.287-293): Polyphemos ate the companions of Odysseus «like a mountain-reared lion». In addition, Odysseus is compared to

a boar in *Iliad* 11.414. If correct, this comparison is a third paradigm. The Blinding of Polyphemos differs, however, from Homer's text. Instead of four companions Odysseus is assisted by two. The drunken Cyclops is sitting instead of lying and sleeping, still holding the wine cup which is a nice example of synopsis.

Another vase with a possible paradigm is the famous Aristonothos krater from an Etruscan tomb at Cerveteri¹. It was made around 650 BC. The inscription reads: Aristonothos epouisen [Aristonothos (Best Bastard) made (me); Cordano 2007]. The letterform and the painted crabs under the handles refer to Euboia but the language is Ionian. Aristonothos migrated from Euboia to Etruria, maybe via Athens and Sicily. The clay of the vase is Etruscan. Side A represents the Blinding of Polyphemos and side B a battle between a war- and a merchant ship. Is there a paradigmatic relation between both scenes? According to most scholars the warship or ship of sea-pirates is Greek and the merchant ship Etruscan. In my view, the merchantman is indeed Etruscan since Aristono-

¹ Martelli 1987: 263-265, no. 40; Giuliani 2003: 96-114; Bagnasco Gianni 2007; Lowenstam 2008: 13-17; Bonauto 2008; 2011.

thos's patron was an Etruscan man (a sailor?) at Caere and since the type of ship is present on other Etruscan artefacts, for example on an impasto pyxis from Caere (c. 630-620 BC; Martelli 1987: 95, 267-268, no. 44.) and an ivory pyxis of Pania (Cristofani 1971; Pizzirani 2005: 255 fig. 2; 257, fig. 9). Most likely, the owner of the krater identified himself with Odysseus. The combination of scenes may refer to a paradigmatic relationship, in other words illustrate the dangers of the sea in past and present (d'Agostino 1995; Cerchiai 2002; 2019). In favour of this interpretation is Homer's *Odyssey* 9.252-254 where Polyphemos asks Odysseus and his companions: «Strangers, who are you? Whence do you sail over the watery ways? Is it on some business, or do you wander at random over the sea, as pirates do who wander hazzarding their lives and bringing evil to men of other lands?». Interestingly, four elements on Side A are in agreement with Homer's text: 1. Odysseus has four companions, 2. He is the fifth man (pempptos) who «whirls the stake around and throws his weight upon it», 3. Polyphemos tries to pull out the stake, and 4. Next to the inscription stands a cheese rack with a milk pail (*Odyssey* 9.322-323). In view of these congruencies the vase may afford a terminus ante quem for the genesis of Homer's *Odyssey*, that is before c. 650 BC. This means that the recent date of the *Odyssey* around 620 BC as is suggested by Martin West (2014), based on the relations with Egypt, particularly the founding of the Greek colony Naukratis in 630 BC, is probably too low.

An Etruscan ivory pyxis from Pania near Chiusi, dated to c. 600 BC (Touchefeu-Meynier 1968: 58-59, no. 156; 973, no. 60-61; Cristofani 1971), shows from right to left, sinistrorsus like the reading direction of Etruscan inscriptions, in the upper frieze Odysseus's escape under a ram (*Odyssey* 9.424-465) and his confrontation with the Skylla, a sea monster with dog heads (*Odyssey* 12.85-110). These two scenes are syntagmatic. But do they relate to the frieze below it that depicts the departure of warriors walking to left and mourning women turned to right? The paradigm may be the hope for a safe return of the warriors. The mourning women may be the wives of the enemy.

Archaic programs

A most interesting example of a syntagmatic and paradigmatic pairing of scenes is presented by an Attic black-figured cup (Boston, MFA 99 519) that is provided with nonsense inscriptions, and

dated to around 550 BC². Side A represents an exceptional scene: Odysseus offering wine to a collapsing Polyphemos whilst his companions draw their swords and carry a wineskin; side B shows Odysseus about to attack with his sword Kirke, here painted in white as a naked woman, like a hetaira. Both sides show a synopsis. In the right corner of both scenes there is as a visual repetition a syntagmatic figure: a fleeing man, on side B he is definitely Eurylochos. On both sides an attack with swords is visible. The paradigm may be the danger of drinking a dangerous liquid, on side A a successful one and on side B an unsuccessful, magical one. The cup in Kirke's hand repeats the form of the image carrier, a nice example of *mise en abime*. Side A differs from Homer's *Odyssey* (3.299-306): Athena was not present in Polyphemos's cave but the attack with a sword is mentioned there: «and I (Odysseus) formed a plan in my great heart to steal near him, and draw my sharp sword from beside my thigh and smite him in the breast, where the midriff holds the liver, feeling for the place with my hand. But a second thought checked me, for right there should we, too, have perished in utter ruin. For we should not have been able to thrust back with our hands from the high door the mighty stone which he had set there».

Classical programs

Kirke now represented as a dressed woman is visible twice in the upper frieze of an Attic red-figure calyx krater, attributed to the Phiale Painter, from a tomb at Felsina (450-440 BC; Morpurgo 2015: 128-129, figs. 4-5; Stansbury-O'Donnell 2009: 35-36, fig. 3). First she acts as a magical woman, then she flees from Odysseus with his sword drawn. The paradigmatic connection is pursuit (*Frauenverfolgung*): the lower frieze depicts men who try to seduce women (Meyer 2009: 27). An Attic red-figure calyx krater (c. 440 BC) more clearly shows the idea of pursuit and seduction in superposed friezes (Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999: 87-89; 2009: 33-35, fig. 1). Above Odysseus pursues, with drawn sword, Kirke, and below a man holding hunting spears pursues women in opposite direction. This program too shows myth and reality.

² Touchefeu-Meynier 1968: 13, no. 5, pl. 3, 2; 86-87, no. 171, pl. 14, 2; 1992, 95, no. 68; Giuliani 2004: 87-95; Lowenstam 2008: 25-27, figs. 8-9.



Fig. 1. Side reliefs of stele Giardini, no. 12. Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico [after Maggiani 1997 (Brizio 1890)].

The impact of the import of Attic vases and, by consequence, the transfer of Greek myths to Felsina is visible on a grave stone (stele Giardini, no. 12) of a deceased woman, dated to c. 400 BC³. The broad sides each have three panels (fig. 1). The central panel on the left side evidently represents Kirke having transformed Odysseus's companions into swines. Panel 3 represents the Skylla holding up swords. Panel 1, however, depicts Daidalos with a hammer, a saw and a bag (Nebelsick 2018: 355-357) as he is visible in a similar way on an inscribed golden bulla, probably from Spina. Opinions differ about the meaning of scenes 4, 5 and 6 (Maggiani 1997: 151). In my view Odysseus, a dressed instead of a nude man, is represented three times: attacking with a sword (probably Kirke), holding the antidote moly that he had got from Hermes, and riding a dolphin, holding the

lifesaving veil that he had got from the sea goddess Ino/Leukothea (Odyssey 5.346). Why was Daidalos added to the Odyssean scenes? The clue is, in my opinion, that both Kirke and Daidalos were regarded as magical persons. According to myth Daidalos, architect, sculptor and carpenter, made living statues. He settled on the Electric islands in the Po delta's lagoons. The combination of two magicians is visible, much earlier, on an Etruscan inscribed relief bucchero vase from Caere (around 630 BC; Nebelsick 2018: 354) that shows Metaia (Medeia) and Taitale (Daidalos). So, the juxtaposition of Daidalos and Kirke on the grave marker was intended as a paradigm of excellent magic. In addition, the local meaning of Daidalos may have inspired the sculptor to add him to the Odyssean program. The idea of salvation is also present on the obverse and reverse of the stele. Both sides represent a deceased woman, on one side standing on a chariot drawn by three winged horses, and walking on the other side (Maggiani 1997: 159, fig. 5, pl. IXa-b). The ivy leaves on both sides refer to Fufluns/Dionysos, a god of salvation in funerary contexts. Under the trigia is a scene showing Aias's suicide. The inscription above it reads: aivastelmunś (Aias Telamonios). Maggiani (1997: 162) holds that he was the presumed ancestor of the deceased woman, rakvi satlnei / [sk] aivas k[ar]munal.

An Etruscan red-figure *stamnos* from Vulci (Parma, MA C 161; c. 350 BC; Painter of Settecami) shows on Side A Odysseus and Kirke who, judged by her raised arms, is surrendering (fig. 2), and on Side B (fig. 3) Odysseus, his dog and Penelope greeting each other (Beazley 1947: 54, no. 3; Touchefeu-Meynier 1968: 243-244, no. 449; Camporeale 1992: 974, no. 9; 976, no. 26). These syntagmatic scenes have a paradigmatic meaning too, showing a contrast: a bad woman opposite a faithful woman. Faithfulness is also presented by Odysseus's dog Argos.

The Etruscan, painted, stone sarcophagus from Torre San Severo (near Orvieto, dated to 350-300 BC) has four sides with symmetrical elements (Touchefeu-Meynier 1968: 111, no. 219, pl. 17, 3; 140, no. 236, pl. 22, 2; Van der Meer 1985; 2004: 29-31; Lowenstam 2008: 165-170, figs. 83-86). One long side represents Achilles killing one of the Trojans in the presence of the ghost of his friend Patroklos, and the other Achilles's son Neoptolemos who is about to kill Polyxena in the presence of the ghost of his father. Both scenes show an Etruscan tomb as a local touch. The short sides represent Odysseus attacking Kirke, and Odysseus sacrificing a ram at the entrance

³ Sassatelli 1993: 123; 1998: 159-160; Maggiani 1997: 150-152, 154, fig. 1, pl. IXb; Morpurgo 2015: 139-142, figs. 10-11).

of the Underworld. This syntagmatic pairing can be explained by Kirke's instruction that Odysseus had to consult the ghost of Teiresias in the Underworld in order to know how to return home. The four scenes are linked by visual elements: Neoptolemos and Odysseus both are about to attack a woman, Achilles and Odysseus are both killing a male victim.

So far unexplained is the meaning of the relation between side A and side B of an Attic red-figured *stamnos* by the Siren painter, dated to



Fig. 2. Etruscan red-figured *stamnos* from Vulci: Odysseus and Kirke. Parma, Museo Archeologico, C 161 (after Beazley).



Fig. 3. Etruscan red-figured *stamnos* from Vulci: Odysseus and Penelope. Parma, Museo Archeologico, C 161 (after Beazley).



Fig. 4. Attic red-figured *stamnos* of the Siren Painter: Odysseus and the Sirens. London British Museum, E440 (after FR).

around 480 BC⁴. Side A (fig. 4) shows Odysseus tied to the mast listening to the voice (song) of the Sirens who are sitting on rocks. The Siren on the left is inscribed: Himeropa which means Desirous or Desirable Voice (Himer-opa; from ops: voice). One of the Sirens with closed eyes plunges downward onto the ship, probably committing suicide as is testified in later literary sources⁵. Side B (fig. 5) represents three Erotes, flying from left to right, respectively carrying a living hare, a tendril and a sash (*tainia*), all attributes of *erasteis*. The inscribed leading one's name is Himeros, the other ones are called *kalos*. The two scenes have in common: 1. the sea, and 2. the concept of Himeros. The (sexual) desire is heteroerotic on side A and homoerotic on side B. But why does a broad drape, probably a *tainia*, cover the stern of the ship? The sash may symbolize, in a proleptic way, the future victory of Odysseus after he resisted seductive women. As for comparison, victorious athletes receive sashes from *Nikai* as is visible on Attic vases. The Siren painter preferred homo- instead of heterosexuality, anyhow friendship between men.

An Attic red-figured *skyphos* from Chiusi, dated to c. 440 BC. (Touchefeu-Meynier 1968: 217-219, no. 373; 248-249, no. 455; pl. 33, 2-3; Havelock 1995; Stansbury-O'Donnell 2014: 377-379, figs. 2-3) shows on one side Telemachos talking to his mother in front of her loom (fig. 6) and on the other side (fig. 7) the old nurse called Antiphata (instead of Eurykleia) washing the feet of Odysseus

⁴ Touchefeu-Meynier 1968: 149-151, no. 250, pl. 24, 3; 1992, 562, no. 155; Shapiro 1993: 112-113; Lowenstam 2008: 47-51, figs. 21-22.

⁵ Lycophron, *Alexandra* 5.712-716; Strabo, *Geographica* 6.1.1; Orphica, *Argonautica* 1284-1290; Hyginus, *Fabula* 141; Toillon 2014: 147-151.



Fig. 5. Attic red-figured *stamnos* of the Siren Painter: Himeros and two Erotes. London British Museum, E440 (after FR).

(Odysseus). Touchefeu-Meynier (1968: 249) suggests that the name is contamination of Eurykleia and Antikleia, the name of Odysseus' mother. I would, however, relate -phata to the verb *phaskoo* («I say»; cf. *Antiphat(t)es*). If correct, *Antiphata* means: contradicting. She pleads for herself when Odysseus threatens to kill her after murdering the suitors of Penelope. The presence of the swineherd *..maos* (*Eumaïos*) may be due to synopsis and a flashback to the *Eumaïos*'s recognition of Odysseus. The syntagmatic relationship between the scenes is made by the presence of a father and his son. The paradigm may be suspension, in other words the prelude to the murder of the suitors. In addition, the vase may be a special commission since Servius (*Ad Aen.* 10.107) writes that *Telemachus* founded *Clusium* (Iozzo 2012: 72-75). Special commissions for local reasons are also known from Greece. For example, an Attic red-figured *kantharos* of the *Brygos Painter*, dated to 490-480 BC (Boston, MFA 95.36), found in Thebes (Boeotia), represents Zeus pursuing *Aigina*, and Zeus pursuing *Ganymedes* (Segal 2014). The scenes are syntagmatic and paradigmatic. As for the local touch, Zeus' pursuit of *Aigina* is known from Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*. Hesiod lived and wrote in Boeotia.

The reliefs of the *Heroön* at *Gjölbaschi-Trysa* (now in Vienna), dated to 400-350 BC show historical and mythical battles and huntings (Touchefeu-Meynier 1968: 258, no. 481; Dentzer 1982: 410-411; Landskron 2016). The sarcophagus in the *heroön* may have contained the corpse of the Lycian king *Trbbēnīmi*. One of the mythical reliefs represents *Odysseus* and *Telemachus* killing the suitors of *Penelope*. Not only *Odysseus*



Fig. 6. Attic red-figured *skyphos* by the Penelope Painter: *Telemachos* and *Penelope*. Chiusi, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 62705 (after FR).



Fig. 7. Attic red-figured *skyphos* by the Penelope Painter: *Odysseus* and *Antiphata*. Chiusi, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 62705 (after FR).

but also *Meleagros*, *Perseus* (referring to *Persia*), *Theseus* (referring to *Athens*) and *Bellerophon* are represented. The latter was the ancestor hero of the *Lycians*. So the choice of heroes is not haphazard. The Lycian king probably identified himself with Greek heroes. As *Alice Landskron* (2016: 299-344) suggests, injustice, i.e. the fights against injustice, may have been another paradigm. The composition of *The Murder of the Suitors* is of Attic origin as is testified by an Attic red-figured *skyphos* from c. 440 BC (Touchefeu-Meynier 1968: 256-257, no. 479, pl. 37, 1; Iozzo 2012: 74, fig. 12). It had a long life as it recurs on an Etruscan urn from the second century BC in view of the dorsal figure.



Fig. 8. Mosaic in the House of Leontis Kloubas in Beth Shean (drawing after N. Sevilla Sadeh).

Roman programs

The floor mosaic (5.60 x 6.70 m) from the Villa of Munatia Procula at Tor Marancio, dated to AD 123 (Vatican, Museo Chiaramonti) not only illustrates the dangers at sea (the Siren and the Skylla) but also the pleasures and escape: Amor sitting on

a ketos is fishing, and Leukothea is holding up her veil (Touchefeu-Meynier 1968: 164-165, no. 292; 1992: 963, no. 163). The mosaic probably originates from the balneum of the Villa since this kind of sea imagery is frequent in Roman baths.

Fifteen lids of Roman sarcophagi, dated to AD 230-300, represent Odysseus and the Sirens in the left half and a deceased, intellectual man holding a scroll between seated philosophers or litterati in the right half⁶. Curiously, the Sirens look like Musae. In mythology Muses successfully fight the Sirens taking feathers from them and placing these on their heads. A sarcophagus in San Simeon shows Apollo and the Musae (with feathers they plucked from the Sirens after a song competition) on the front and Odysseus as listener on both sides of the chest. Therefore, Björn Christan Ewald (Ewald 1998: 255) tentatively suggests that the power of music is the central theme. Odysseus would be the ideal, exemplary listener, an *aner mousikos*. In short, Ewald holds that the Greek myth was reinterpreted, making listening to music as a *Bildungsideal*. One now lost box of a sarcophagus, however, represents Odysseus and the Sirens in an afterlife context. In my view, the deceased probably hoped for a safe journey to the other world or for a safe return of the soul to its home. Some of the fifteen lids were reused in Christian contexts, as a warning to avoid temptations (Klauser 1963; Moraw 2017: 135, 139-141).

A late antique program

The 8 metres long floor mosaic (fig. 8) in hall 3 of the House of Kyrios Leontis Kloubas in Scythopolis (Beth Shean, discovered in 1964), a public building, a complex built around a courtyard, provided with a small synagogue, that is dated to around 450 AD, has three panels (Moraw 2015: 110-113; 2017: 141-142). In the upper panel a Nereid (Leukothea) sits astride on a sea centaur and Odysseus tied to the mast, about to pass a flute playing Siren with two fish tails. Below him we see a sailor (in my view not Odysseus because of the different hair style) in a vessel that carries amphora's. He passes the Siren and attacks a sea monster with his trident. The inscription reads: "May the Lord help Leontis Kloubas". The inscription in the central panel showing pigeons reads: «Be remembered for good and for bless-

⁶ Ewald 1998; Moraw 2015: 114-116; 2017: 129-132; Van den Hoek 2015: 353-357, figs. 20-27.

ing Lord Leontis the Kloubas because he paved with a mosaic for his own salvation and (that of his brother Jonathan this (building) here with his own money». Leontis was a Jewish man in view of a later added depiction of a menorah in the inscription. The lower panel shows a Nilometer indicating 16 cubits (AI to IZ), Alexandria, a crocodile attacking an ox, the personification of the Nile and a merchantman with a sailor carrying so far unidentified, conical objects. As for the meaning of the mosaic, opinions differ heavily. Some scholars, incorrectly, hold that the program has an eschatological message although the context is not funerary. I just mention two other recent interpretations. According to Asher Ovadiah and Yehudit Turnheim the central ideas are salvation from the temptations on the one hand and the prosperity of the Nile on the other hand (Ovadiah, Turnheim 2003). They do not exclude that Alexandria was seen as a city of debauchery and corruption. According to Nava Sevilla Sadeh (2006) the mosaic contains the promise of true wisdom. She compares the positive wisdom of Alexandria with the negative omniscience of the Sirens. These scholars, however, did not pay attention to all the details. In my view the vessels on the ships refer to the risks of Kloubas's commercial activities. On his ship in the upper panel stand contemporary wine-amphoras, on the second ship, below, stand, in my opinion, jars closed with a clay stopper. Jars with stoppers were used in Egypt from the first dynasty until late antiquity. If my interpretation is correct, Kloubas compares himself with Odysseus because of the dangers of the sea. Alexandria was the city where he sold excellent wine from Galilee. He took another liquid in conical jars back from Alexandria to Galilee.

Conclusions

The paradigmatic programs reveal that Odysseus was a hero who overwhelmed barbarians like the Cyclops, thus being, by ruse (*mètis*) and courage (*aretè*), an aristocratic role model in the archaic period. In the fifth century BC he was seen as someone who could resist seductions like those of the Sirens. In the fourth century BC and later on, powerful persons like kings identified themselves with Odysseus. On Roman sarcophagus lids of the third century AD Odysseus is presented as defying the Sirens, in other words the dangers of death. These lids were reused later on in Christian contexts, with new message: a warning to resist temptations. The late antique image, the mosaic

in Beth-Shean, shows Kloubas, a wine-merchant, whose dangerous sea journey to and from Alexandria is compared to Odysseus's passing a Siren. What all scenes have in common, is the victory of the hero.

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