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BOTH SIDES MATTER? READING GREEK VASES USING PICTORIAL SEMIOTICS. THE PROBLEM OF SYNTAGMATIC AND PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS OF THE IMAGE[1]

Abstract: *This paper explores the possibilities of using methods of analysis from the field of pictorial semiotics in studying Greek vase painting, and thus resolving the problem of interpreting multiple scenes on a single vase. Its aim is to explain and clarify basic notions connected to this discipline, such as imagery, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, and how they relate to Greek iconography, using various examples. The main premise is that the separate scenes on the artifact are connected syntagmatically and not only paradigmatically as it is usually indicated, thus the joint interpretation always precedes the analysis of detached scenes, the latter being dependent upon the syntagmatic reducibility of the image.*

Keywords: *Greek vase painting; pictorial semiotics; Greek imagery*

Archaeology as perhaps no other discipline absorbs new methods and methodologies which enable it to expand its palette of research tools. This is not surprising, as at the center of the archeologist's attention stands the artifact, above all, a silent source. An archeological artifact can speak only through interpretation, and it is the researcher who gives it meaning. Artifacts have a dual ontology: they possess a textual aspect as well as a material one (Shanks 1996; Kucypera and Wadyl 2012, 621–623; Olsen 2013), and

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both of these can be explored using very different methods. Nevertheless, introducing novelties to already established research procedures often meets with a kind of backlash from the professional community, as some scholars adopt a skeptical approach for a variety of different reasons (see Jameson 1994, 193–196; Rotroff 1998). Instead of condemning the doubter's stance, let's do it justice and focus on the potential dangers that the introduction of certain novel methods could bring to the field of Classical archaeology.

Such malpractices are generally recognized under the term of 'cargo cult science'. R. Feynman (1974, 10–13; also reprinted in Feynman 1989, 308–317), when addressing the graduates of Caltech, gave a famous speech in which he coined this phrase for those disciplines/scholars/scientists who lack the most important trait: scientific integrity. The original cargo cults were formed in Polynesia after WWII, as the result of contacts between natives and the American army.[2] Soldiers built airfields to make possible the regular supply of cargo − hence the name. Due to culture shock, after the Americans' departure, the tribesmen started to mimic their activities. They constructed fake airfields and fake radios with headphones made from straw, and they were waiting for giant birds who would land on the islands and deliver the mythical cargo. They mimicked every activity of the Americans, but, of course, nothing happened. So, a branch of science that borrows methods from other disciplines without examining their applicability, without first checking them with the source material, science whose sole purpose is to produce a given outcome, is no science at all. It only mimics certain activities, but without a true scientific approach. Of course, this is the most extreme view, but adopting methods from other disciplines without the know-how of proper methodology could resemble those cargo cult practices of the Polynesians.

At first inspection, pictorial semiotics, when applied to various analyses of Greek vase painting, posses all the necessary features to question its adoption into Classical studies. Although it has been present in the discipline for more than 30 years (Hoffmann 1977; Bérard 1983, 5–31; Morris 1994b, 37), it is still practiced only by a few scholars who study ancient iconography (Bérard 1983; Bérard and Durand 1989; Lissarrague 1989; Lissarrague 1990; Beard 1991, 12–36; Hoffmann 1997; Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999; Shanks 1999; Hurwit 2002, 1–22; Steiner 2007), with the rest of the community presenting but marginal interest. Partially, this state of affairs is caused by the obscurity of the interpretations and the lack of coherence on the part

[2] Cargo cults are in reality a much more complicated issue, however this is still an acute depiction, cf. (White 1965).

of the scholars, who often do not give a proper explanation of their methods (see below). The purpose of this paper is to describe the basics of pictorial semiotic analysis in the most understandable manner, and to clarify all the ambiguities presented in the scientific literature.

Pictorial semiotics deals mostly with the metalanguage connected to the process of reading images within a culture (Beard 1991, 12–15; see also Leśniak 2013). In short, its task is to describe how we, as cultural agents, create and read images. Semioticians believe that the iconography, in this case monuments of Greek vase paintings, should be read as a part of Ancient Greek imagery (Bérard 1983, 5–7). Both these terms, image-reading and imagery, are essential, so let's explain them in detail.

How does the viewer perceive an image? M. Beard (1991, 12–15) presented an excellent analogy in one of her papers. Let's imagine a perfume advertisement in a newspaper. The scene depicts modern, beautiful, and independent-looking women chatting with a man in one of the atmospheric cafes of Paris, with the Eiffel Tower looming in the distance. The brand is so famous that it requires only its logo presented on a bottle of fragrance in the corner of the picture to be recognized instantaneously. This picture evokes certain sensations in the viewer, we read it as an ad connecting this particular brand with the glamorous life of the elite, the pleasurable Parisian life, as we often imagine it (Beard 1991, 13).[3] However, if we remove only one detail, the perfume bottle, and replace it with, let's say, the HIV awareness campaign logo, the whole picture will change rapidly. We would read a different scene, the connections would be transformed, and now the cafe scene would be read as a kind of warning against the shadiness of modern life, its superficiality, as a critique of sexual liberty, etc. The image is read by the viewer, constructed in his mind through knowledge about its structure, about the signs that it uses, the rules for its reading, and the iconic repertoire available for that particular culture (Bérard 1983, 5–9; Beard 1991, 12–15; Shanks 1996, 12–21). It is that repertoire, the total set of images that circulate in a given culture, and the rules used to create and read images using it, that we understand under the term 'imagery'. To grasp the particular image conveyed in the above mentioned advertisement one needs to be a member of a culture who recognizes the given perfume brand and creates specific associations concerning this scene. To understand the picture with the HIV awareness campaign logo, one not only needs to recognize the logo, but also the specific construction of such an image, i.e., that it is a transformed version

[3] See also probably the most famous reading of an image in the context of modern culture, R. Barthes' (1972, 116–117) interpretation of the cover of *Paris Match* magazine.

of a traditional advertisement. The play with convention is unrecognizable to someone who has no prior knowledge about the commercials that are the subject of parody in this particular example.[4] The notion that the image is constructed and read using imagery is the foundation of pictorial semiotics.

In a similar manner, the vase painting scenes are part of the imagery of ancient Greeks. If we want to explore Greek iconography, we should approach it via imagery. The very first question that this stipulation evokes concerns doubts about the possibility of a successful reconstruction of ancient Greek imagery (stressed already by Beard 1991, 18–19). Indeed, full comprehension of the rules which had guided the Greeks would never be possible. Still, this lack of completeness and even our inability to reconstruct the viewpoint of the Ancient viewer against every image are not sufficient conditions for disregarding this method of analysis. Because the rules of semiotic reading of images are present in all cultures, and each culture has a particular set of such rules, the image must always be accessed through these procedures; a neutral reading does not exist. If we would not make an attempt to perceive iconographic sources through the lenses of reconstructed imagery of the Ancient Greeks, we would be viewing those images through the imagery of contemporary occidental culture, often without even knowing it.

The simplest way to discuss the foundations of this method of research is to apply it to a specific artifact and explore the issues surrounding its interpretation. The iconographical sources are by far the largest cluster of data available for studying the warfare of the Archaic Greeks (Salmon 1977, 84–101; van Wees 2000, 125; Miścicki 2012, 90–91; Viggiano and van Wees 2013, 63). Despite that, the complex nature of the scenes is responsible for the rather perplexing reputation of Greek vases that persists among the scholars (Schwartz 2009, 20–21; Matthew 2012, 19–38).

The scenes shown in Pl.1 are drawings of the decoration of a protocorinthian olpe, dated to 650–640 BC, found in a tomb in Etruria, now in Rome, and attributed to the so-called Chigi Painter (Amyx 1988, 31–32), taken from E. Pfuhl (1923, Abb. 59) canonical works. The vase is commonly known as the Chigi vase or the Chigi olpe, and is believed to be the best depiction of a hoplite phalanx in Archaic Greek art (Nilsson 1929, 240ff.; Lorimer

[4] However, the recognition of the transformation in not requisite for understanding that this image is a warning against HIV; the extent of information that an image could convey varies. The reading is plural; the process takes place each time the image is being viewed, but the outcome is culturally determined.

1947, 80–83; Cartledge 1977, 19; Salmon 1977, 87; Hannestad 2001, 111; for the transitional phase of this formation: Anderson 1991, 19; Snodgrass 1999, 58). The drawing is very precise and perfectly reproduces the style of the artifact. Here we have three separate scenes: youths hunting hares (perhaps ephebes? see D'Acunto 2013, 48–52), two hoplite armies fighting, and, finally, adolescents (or adults, see D'Acunto 2013, 52–70) hunting a lion, who devours one of them, separated by the figure of double-bodied sphinx from other adolescents engaged in the cavalcade. A survey of publications referring to this vase in warfare studies reveals only interpretations of the warrior scene (Nilsson 1929, 240ff.; Lorimer 1947, 80–83; Salmon 1977, 87; Anderson 1991, 19; Snodgrass 1999, 58; van Wees 2000, 136–139; van Wees 2004, 170–173; Hannestad 2001, 111; Schwartz 2009, 126–127; Viggiano and van Wees 2013, 67–68). Although some warfare historians do show the close connections between the warrior frieze on the olpe and representation of warriors on other artifacts (van Wees 2000, 136–139; van Wees 2004, 170–173), they do not connect the images on the vase: each of them exists separately, occupying different zones of interpretation. The analysis conducted by Pfuhl (1923, 104) was based on similar principles. The absolute lack of inter-relations between the scenes is exemplified by the editing of the drawing. In fact, Pfuhl changed the sequence of the scenes from the olpe. On the vase, the youth scene is located on the lowest part of the decoration, the warrior frieze on the neck, and they are separated by the cavalcade/hunting scene which is located centrally (Amyx 1988, 31–32; Hurwit 2002, 8–17). It seems that the hunting/cavalcade frieze was the most important one: being the largest and located in the middle of the object, it also incorporates various elements and themes. For modern scholars, the warrior frieze was the most important because it is a unique image. Its dominant position in analysis becomes obvious when we look at the Pfuhl drawing. Because the hoplites frieze occupies the center of the picture, he could not fit the middle scene in full length, omitting elements like the badly preserved judgment of Paris (Miścicki 2014, 90–91). The original version of the drawing used by Pfuhl (Karo 1899–1901, pls. 44–45) presented all the scenes, uncut and in proper sequence, even the ornaments on the rim were depicted, hence the editing was a conscious choice. A specific reading was constructed which had re-created the artifact, shaping the paths of interpretation for many decades to come.

The first analysis which unified all the scenes on the Chigi vase was done only relatively recently, by J. M. Hurwit (2002, 1–22), thus opening the path to other interpretations based on the same methodology (D'Acunto 2013;

see also Mugione and Benincasa 2012). Hurwit believed that all the images on this object are strictly related and form a coherent narration (Hurwit 2002, 16–17). If we follow the vertical axis we can observe that the artist depicted the journey into adulthood, the various rites of passage which are essential for a boy to progress to being a page, and then to being a warrior – hoplite, seen as the culmination of a man's life (Hurwit 2002, 17–18). The vase could also be read horizontally, along the youths frieze. It depicts the years just before the initiation into becoming a warrior, formative for a youth male. Here, reality and myth come together: 'This axis, perhaps, shows what makes a man a hero: leonine courage and the company and favor of the gods. But it hints as well at the permeability of the boundaries between the mortal and divine and, with the ambiguous doubleness of the double-sphinx, the mauling of the youth by the lion, and the imminent, fateful decision of Paris, the dangers of such an existence' (Hurwit 2002, 19).

The differences between those two approaches are essential. Pfuhl, as well as warfare historians, explained the scene on the olpe separating it completely from the rest of the vase, but also connecting it with other representations of warriors in vase painting. Hurwit has read the artifact as a homogenous object, merging all three scenes into one narration, one image. The intrinsic nature of the warrior frieze cannot be analyzed separately from the rest of the scenes on the olpe, otherwise its meaning is changed, viewed differently. Do we always need to seek such connections between all the scenes on one object? Do both sides of the vase always matter? Those are fundamental questions that rise from these reflections.

Some scholars are rather skeptical about the possibility of reading all the scenes together. T. Rasmussen's (1991, 62) opinion about the Chigi vase could serve as an example: 'It is just conceivable that someone with sufficient ingenuity could find a connecting thread running through all the major scenes on the Chigi olpe; or they might be illustrative of some epic poem now lost. But it is unlikely. Many Greek vases of all periods show quite unrelated scenes at different levels or on opposite sides, and there is no need to search for unity of theme at this early date even on such a rigorously planned work'.

Despite the fact that without a doubt Hurwit discovered such relations between the scenes on this particular object, the overall uncertainty remains. It is easy to imagine a situation in which two scenes are placed on the same object even though they have nothing in common. Perhaps the not-so-crafty artisan was only able to paint two thematically unrelated scenes to

a high technical standard. It is then probable that such images would still be placed on one object to enhance its commercial value. However, this method of approaching the problem is not in accordance with the principles of semiotics for three main reasons: 1. The notion of merging scenes 'randomly' does not correspond with the imagery system. Adjacent scenes are selected with accordance to the rules of imagery. Only particular sets of scenes could be put together truly 'randomly', that is, without conscious consideration of what they represent (Bérard 1983, 9–12). For example, if two scenes were set so far apart that merging them on one object would be viewed as crossing cultural norms, such a composition would not be perceived as random. Instead, the contrast and juxtaposition would dominate the reading. That leads to another reason: 2. it is the viewer who decides whether to merge scenes or not. The image exists only as a viewed image (see Frontisi-Ducroux 1989, 151–165; Beard 1991, 12–19; Miścicki 2014, 89–91); even if the viewer is trying to decode the author's message, such a process will never be an objective one. The author's intent is always an intention that is 'being read' by the viewer and exists only as such. In this sense, the author of the image is dead just as much as Barthes' author (the creator of literary works, see Barthes 1999, 247–252).[5] We do not recognize this on a regular basis due to communicative success: the intention of the sender (author) usually coincides with the intention of the receiver (viewer), after all, language works, and pictorial language works just as well. To recapitulate, the scenes are never truly 'random' and are always the scenes perceived by the viewer. Yet the most important reason 3. is the very ontology of the artifact. Although Hurwit pointed out inconsistencies in Rasmussen's (1991, 62) view, both of them, as well as other scholars (Small 1999, 570–571, n. 24; Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999, 124–126; Hurwit 2002, 1–3; Ferrari 2003, 43–44, n. 38), perceive searching for links between scenes as searching for one unifying theme, or treating them as illustrative material for a narrative, either created ad hoc or reflecting already existing texts. However, the scenes on the vase are not only related paradigmatically, but also syntagmatically, the latter being the principal connection.

Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations are among the cardinal notions of semiotics, that is why their proper understanding is pivotal for understanding the methods of this discipline. Unfortunately, scholars working with ancient

[5] This does not exclude the author's perspective from the discourse. Vase painters are also viewers, members of Athenian or Corinthian society which used that imagery. In fact, since they do not posses any individual traits, apart from technical skills, they exist only as a by-product of their ancient society. Whatever can be said about the viewer could also be said about the maker, provided that they occupy the same social niche.

Greek iconography very rarely, or, at best vaguely, explain these relations in their papers (Hoffmann 1977; Bérard 1983; Stewart 1983, 67–68 ; Stewart 1987, 32–33; Hoffmann 1994, 80; Ferrari 2003; Steiner 2007, 12–13); sometimes they omit them entirely (Bérard and Durand 1989; Small 1999; Hurwit 2002, 1–4; Muth 2008, 15–24), or translate them in a very specific form, which is sometimes incompatible with the principles of semiotics (Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999).

M. D. Stansbury-O'Donnell's (1999) book could serve as an example. His work is conceived as a textbook for pictorial narrative, and syntagmatic structure as well as paradigms are specifically defined: 'syntagmatic relationships are those that admit the possibility of combination in a sequence of successive scenes from the same basic story (...). Paradigmatic relationships are those based on the principle of substitution and similarity, along the lines of analogy and metaphor. Hence a set of images would be selected from different stories, but would all involve the same kind of action, theme, or other form of similarity. For example, a series of wedding scenes, the loves of Zeus, combat duels, or heroic deaths from different battles or wars would be examples of paradigmatic relationship' (Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999, 118).[6] Syntagma[7] understood in this way is de facto a continuous or cyclic narrative, furthermore, following this definition, every syntagma is also a paradigm, because it is also based on the principle of similarity.

Semioticians have very different definitions of those terms. Following the basic textbook for the discipline (Chandler 2007), we find that both of these relations can be illustrated through a graph (Chandler 2007, 84, fig 3: 1), here (Pl. 2). An explanation follows: 'A syntagm is an orderly combination of interacting signifiers which forms a meaningful whole within a text – sometimes, following Saussure, called a "chain". Such combinations are made within a framework of syntactic rules and conventions (both explicit and inexplicit)' (Chandler 2007, 85). 'A paradigm is a set of associated signifiers or signifieds which are all members of some defining category,

[6] Since Stansbury-O'Donnell (1999) does not give the source of this definition, it is difficult to track the thought-process behind it. His work is based on the model of narrative structure proposed by Barthes (1977c), in an article translated as *Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives*. However, in this article the French scholar very clearly evokes the correct definition of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. It should be also noted that the subject of the article is narration, not an image (or, in this case, not text, only its properties), hence the Stansbury-O'Donnell book is restricted to narration within images and not the images themselves.

[7] 'Syntagm' is also a correct form.

but in which each is significantly different. (...) Whereas syntagmatic analysis studies the "surface structure" of a text, paradigmatic analysis seeks to identify the various paradigms (or pre-existing sets of signifiers) which underlie the manifest content of texts' (Chandler 2007, 84–86). If we look at the picture, the differences and similarities become apparent. 'The plane of the syntagm is that of the combination of "this-and-this-and-this" (as in the sentence, "the man cried"), while the plane of the paradigm is that of the selection of "this-or-this-or-this" (e.g. the replacement of the last word in the same sentence with "died" or "sang")' (Chandler 2007, 84).[8] Although these distinctions go back to the times of F. de Saussure ([1916] 1983, 121–127) and R. Jakobson (1971a, 599; 1971b, 719–720; see also Barthes 1986, 58–89), they are still valid. Only the perspective has been transferred from the inherent value of the message to the receiver. And although these distinctions refer originally to texts, or sentences, the principles of pictorial semiotics are exactly the same (Barthes 1977b, 46–51). C. Bérard (1983, 5–14) applies them frequently in his studies of Greek iconography.[9]

Nevertheless, let's explain these concepts on an example. This kylix, a drinking vessel now in the possession of the British Museum (Pl. 3; Casson 1958, pls. 5–6), is decorated with two strictly related, very similar scenes. On each, a merchantmen is depicted which is being pursued by a pirate galley. In the first scene, the sailing ship is caught off guard with its sails down, in the other, presumably concluding the action, the sail is set, but her fate is inevitably sealed, as the crew of the galley appears to be putting down the mast, which was done before the attack (Casson 1967, 86–87; Ducrey 1985, 197). Let's examine the syntagmatic relations of one of those scenes. It consist of three elements (Pl. 3: 1): 1. the sea, 2. the sailing ship, 3. the galley. We could test this syntagma using one of two types of transformation: addition and deletion (Barthes 1986, 62–89; Chandler 2007, 88–93). Here we will solely be interested in deletion; our goal is to reduce this image without changing its meaning. On this condition we can remove only one element, the sea, indicated by a wavy line. Without it the scene would work just as well, as the viewer would just imagine the only possible setting for such action. However, we cannot reduce any of the vessels. The image of a sailing ship alone means something different

[8] They are strictly connected; for instance, the sentence: 'He was the man, the hero, the villain, the devil' has a paradigmatic extension used as a part of the syntagma.

[9] Since semiotics is the study of symbols, it goes beyond text analysis into anthropology and archaeology.

than the same ship being pursued by a war galley, and a war galley alone has a different meaning than when it is depicted chasing a ship. Only the combination of the two of them creates this particular image. The scene on the other side of the cup is almost an exact copy of the first (Pl. 3: 2), but since it depicts a later moment in the pursuit, they both align into a narrative structure. The paradigmatic similarity between them traditionally serves as the grounds for the connection, yet let's assume that the scene from the other side is part of the syntagmatic structure of this image (Pl. 3: 3). If we do so, we can try to reduce it, cut it out completely. But if we did, we would change the meaning of the whole image, the action would be left without a conclusion. If we reduced this scene, the reading would be significantly changed, therefore we must leave it as it is.

It has been proven that the second scene on the Archaic kylix is in fact an irreducible part of the syntagma, still we can ask what would have happened if this other scene was completely different, a separate and distant image? Perhaps a more thorough analysis would be needed to prove the existence of a connection between the scenes? But what if even this means failed? The mistake lies in mixing the syntagmatic and paradigmatic structure. Hurwit (1985, 158; 2002, 16) in his analysis aimed to prove the existence of paradigmatic relations between the scenes, instead he proved syntagmatic irreducibility: the scenes on the olpe cannot be separated without changing its meaning.

Scholars almost unanimously attach great importance to the context of the image and the vase (Gill 1991, 29–47; Hoffmann 1994, 71–80; Shanks 1996; Shapiro 2000, 313–337; Hurwit 2002, 3–7): where it was found, in what type of site, its archaeological features, where it was made, how it is dated, in what particular circumstances it could have been used, etc. The context of the artifact is the key to its interpretation, because it is involved in the process of reading the image. The Christian cross implies certain connotations on its own, but when we see it hanged on a wall, for instance, in a room in a public building, its context changes, and so does the reading. Now the cross is not purely a religious symbol, but also a religious and perhaps a political manifestation; it challenges the notion of the separation of church and state, etc. The very fact that the cross is hanging on a wall in a particular place becomes part of the syntagma of the image.

Let's further imagine that our perfume/HIV awareness advertisement takes up only half of the page; below it we can find something different, a watch advertisement or something of that sort. At first, we would look at both of them at the same time, perceiving them together, then we would

make a clear distinction between those two massages, or we would connect them if we found a link between them. It is the artifact with its context that is the equivalent of a sentence, not the image alone. In this case: vase (as a material object) = sentence. The set of scenes on a particular vase serves as the closest analogy, the closest context for each one of those scenes. A description of an artifact in which the context is stressed, but simultaneously the other scenes on the vase are omitted seems to be self-contradictory. Each scene on a vase, as well as the pot itself, together with its shape, its wider context, and the elements of its *chaîne opératoire* create the extensive syntagmatic structure of an image, and it is up to the researcher to discard those elements that are deemed redundant for the analysis, including scenes on the vase. However, such an action requires some explanation, and, most importantly, the scholar needs to be aware which part of the image and under what conditions he is addressing. The scholars who conduct analyses of the Chigi olpe from the perspective of warfare studies, focusing solely on the warrior frieze, could be interpreting a different artifact than the one before the reduction. In turn, L. Casson (1958, 15–16), when writing on the details of rigging of ancient ships on the basis of the cup from Vulci, does not have this problem, as the reduction of the image to this particular detail does not change its meaning with the addition or deletion of the rest of syntagma.

Given that the image is supposedly being constructed by the viewer, we need to present some support for this argument using examples of such practices from Ancient Greece. Stansbury-O'Donnell (1999, 128) claims that the sources are inconclusive: 'Indeed, such connections go beyond the focus of literary accounts-description of the narrative, and move beyond the realm of interpretation.' He cites the Ancient *ekphrases* like the description of the shield of Achilles (*Il*. 18.478–608), where it is hard to find one unifying theme apart from the detailed description of the scenes. Yet, the very act of describing all of the scenes together reaffirms the existence of a syntagmatic relation between them. The lack of a persisting thematic connection is not an obstacle to the act of reading them as an entity. Despite that, we also have some reliable evidence for the intentional collocation of separate scenes to create narrative chains, even though the images are spread over various objects (Marconi 2004, 27–40).[10] One of excavated graves

[10] Marconi is analyzing the consumption of Attic vases outside Attica, whether Attic imagery was recognizable in other parts of the Greek *oikumene*. Here his case study is used only as a reference to a syntagma. Generally, see Marconi 2004, 27–40, for further reading on this case.

of the Contrada Mose cemetery near Akragas, marked n. 2, contained rich offerings (De Miro and Fiorentini 1980, 113–137). Among the artifacts found there was a bronze greave, which characterizes the deceased as a warrior, and a series of vases: a band decorated amphora, a black-glazed amphora, and three Athenian black-figure amphorae. There was no visible alteration to the grave, so it was probably a cenotaph. All the images on the black-figure amphorae were connected with the life of a warrior, forming a coherent narration. First, the scene of departure, then of fighting, represented by a duel, and finally the body of a warrior being retrieved from the battle. There is also a scene of races, which could also be connected with the death of a hero. The vases were probably exhibited at the ceremony, and thus where carefully picked. The dominant scene, the carrying of the warrior's body, probably served as an assurance to the family that the young *aristoi* had been buried with honor, after the battle, as a piece of his armor would demonstrate (Marconi 2004, 27–40). This set represents one syntagmatic structure build from various artifacts, based on the paradigmatic relations between them. One long sentence/image was created for the particular purpose of a burial ceremony.

If we know that the syntagmatic relations between elements of an image are used to the build the narration forming that particular image, then where is the paradigmatic structure situated? Properly understood paradigmatic relations refer to other images within the imagery (Barthes 1986, 58–59;[11] Chandler 2007, 83–90). The majority of the efforts put by semioticians into the analysis of images is dedicated to the paradigmatic transformations of the image, and the creation of its meaning through this process (Chandler 2007, 87–88). It is usually done via substitution and transposition of the elements, with special attention paid to what is missing from the picture (Chandler 2007, 87–88). The absence of certain elements compared to other images helps to define the meaning through difference. With the changes of the syntagmatic structure, paradigmatic relations change; when paradigms are tested, the syntagma changes accordingly. We could ask a handful of questions about the paradigmatic structures of Greek vases. How would the reading of the scene change if instead of a merchant ship we had a second galley? How can we read the specific context of that scene – a drinking cup, probably connected with a symposion – together with other images presented on similar cups? How can we connect this scene with other marine images? Switching attention to the Chigi vase, we could add paradigmatic relations to Hurwit's syntagma. For instance, the rather peculiar selection

[11] Barthes uses de Saussure's term 'associations', which is, perhaps, more intuitive.

of animals demands some kind of explanation, i.e. a 'panther' animal typical for Corinthian art (Shanks 1996, 73–150) is not represented. The figure of the sphinx could be characterized through its presence in the imagery (Hoffmann 1994, 72–77), through similarities and differences simultaneously, as the olpe bears a rare representation of a double-bodied sphinx. The warrior frieze could be contrasted with other vases attributed to the Chigi Painter (Smith 1890, 167–180; Amyx 1988, 31) (Pl. 4), (Washburn 1906, 116–127; Amyx 1988, 32) (Pl. 5). If we compared the syntagmatic structure of those three works, we would find strong connections between them, however, the hoplite scene on the Macmillan Aryballos is often considered to be an unsuccessful representation of the phalanx (Salmon 1977, 88), as it lacks the main features of this formation. Yet perhaps this difference could be turned around and explained if we reduced syntagmatically the supposed phalanx on the remaining two vases, and after that the image would not change markedly? Where is the olpe situated when it comes to depictions of warriors in Corinthian vase painting? Finally, the warrior frieze lacks various types of warriors, such as the mounted hoplites (Dunbabin 1962, 146; Greenhalgh 1973, 85–88), the cavalrymen (Dunbabin 1962, 151; Greenhalgh 1973, 85–88; Amyx 1988, 163), the light armed (Snodgrass 1965, 113; Snodgrass 1999, 50–55), or the archers (Snodgrass 1999, 50–55). Thanks to the richness of Greek imagery these interpretations could be immensely extended.

The differentiation between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, together with an understanding of the characteristics of imagery, forms the backbone of pictorial semiotics. The rules of analysis are not particularly difficult, however, they do require great knowledge of the source material and a conscious approach to it. Iconography is not just a transparent window through which one can gaze upon an ancient society. The contact is made via the distortive prism of imagery, which itself is a product of a past culture, and that is why we can still access antiquity through it. One has to be constantly reminded that the products of imagery do not reflect reality, but the way reality should be. Iconography is not history, but poetry, in the Aristotelian sense (*Poetics* 1451b; see also Small 1999, 563). When we read ancient images without this knowledge, it is we who are practicing cargo cult science. Just like the tribesmen observing an unfamiliar and exotic object, the airplane, using their own eyes, their own imagery. The method that was in danger of being pulled into this trap turned out to be the only reasonable escape from it.

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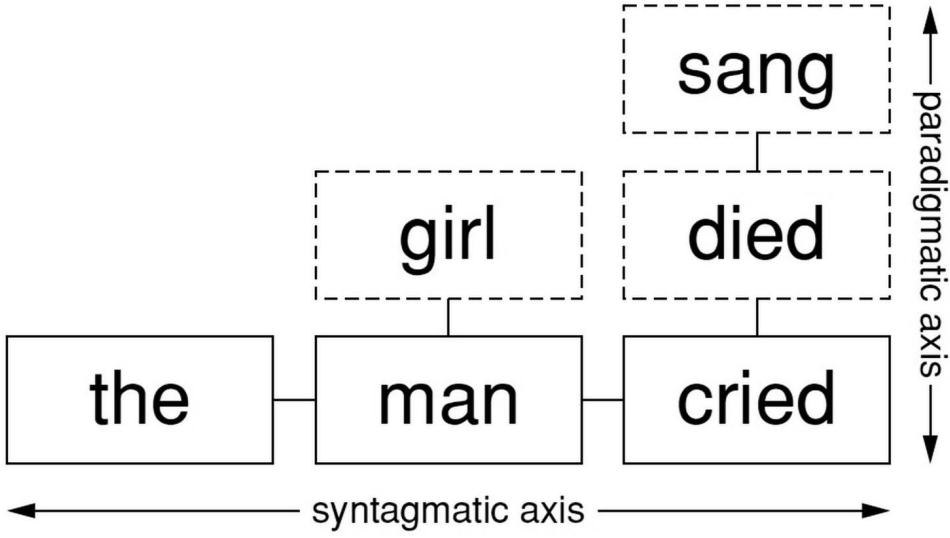
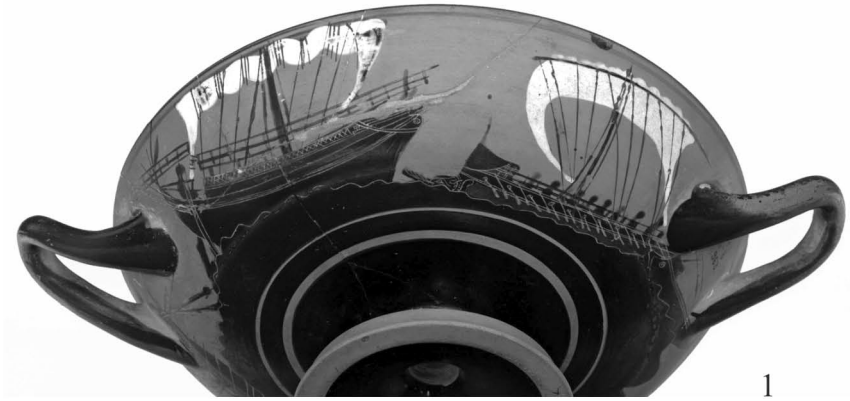
Pl. 1. Friezes from the Chigi vase. Protocorinthian olpe, Chigi Painter *c*. 650–640 BC, Rome, Villa Giulia 22679. Reproduced from Pfuhl 1923, no. 59.



Pl. 2. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes and relations between them.
Reproduced from Chandler 2007, 84. fig. 3: 2.



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Pl. 3. 1 – Athenian black-figure kylix, merchant sailing ship attack by pirate galley, from Vulci, 520–500 BC, London British Museum 1867,0508.963. © Trustees of the British Museum; 2 – Other side of kylix, pirate galley closing in on the merchantmen. © Trustees of the British Museum; 3 – Both scenes on the vase shown together. © Trustees of the British Museum

Pl. 4. The Macmillan aryballos, Chigi Painter, *c.* 640 BC, London British Museum 1889,0418.1. © Trustees of the British Museum

Pl. 5. Friezes from Berlin aryballos, Chigi Painter *c.* 650–640 BC, Berlin Staatliche Museen 3773. Reproduced from Washburn 1906, pl. 2