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ABSTRACT

The Vase as a Stage?

Assteas' Calyx-Krater from Buccino and the Importance of Visual Parody in Paestan Vase-Painting

Federico Figura

In this paper, the problematic relationship between theatre and vase-painting is investigated by focusing on Assteas' calyx-krater in Buccino. This depicts a parody of the rape of Cassandra. Since the scene has never before been the subject of an iconographic analysis, first a detailed comparison with other southern Italian depictions of the episode is expounded. Besides showing how Assteas' example is rooted in the southern Italian tradition, all the visual elements that depart from the 'canonical' iconography of the rape are identified in order to better understand the *geloion*. This exercise also helps to challenge the assumption that the image's origin lies in the treatment of the rape as found in drama. Comparing the Assteas fragment with the corpus of the phlyx vases, this article demonstrates how the former does not in fact represent a theatrical scene, as well as investigating how the comic effect was achieved differently in the visual field. Finally, an analysis of the literary sources entirely supports a non-theatrical origin for the parody, and instead reveals Assteas' iconopoietic ability to use different comic devices.

KEYWORDS

Vase-Painting, Assteas, Cassandra, Parody

The Vase as a Stage?

Assteas' Calyx-Krater from Buccino and the Importance of Visual Parody in Paestan Vase-Painting

Disentangling Theatrical Imagery and Vase Iconography. The Case of the Buccino Fragment by Assteas

1 “Per lo stato di conservazione del frammento, per la nozione precisa del luogo di provenienza, che è Buccino, l'antica Volcei, e più che mai per l'interesse della scena su di esso rappresentata, la quale si può facilmente riportare alla sua originaria interezza, ben possiamo dire essere questo il principe dei vasi fliacici da noi finora conosciuti”¹.

2 If among the Attic vases the title of *rex vasorum* rightfully belongs to the François Vase, then few other southern Italian examples can contend with the Buccino krater for the title of *princeps*². Published for the first time by Ettore Gabrici in 1911, the exceptional nature of the scene, painted on one of the three fragments originally belonging to a calyx-krater, was immediately clear³. Created by the Paestan painter Assteas around 350 BC, the scene depicts a parodic reversal of the rape of Cassandra (fig. 1)⁴. The role inversion has the priestess raping the Greek hero Ajax, son of Oileus, while he holds the Trojan statue of Athena in a gesture of supplication. While the general meaning of the image has been convincingly understood since the first publication of the piece, the question of the scene's origin is widely debated. Almost all scholars have assumed a more or less direct connection with the theatre in order to trace the origin of the rape's parody. It has been argued that the fragment can be regarded as one of the so-called phlyax vases, thus considering the image as a ‘photograph’ of a specific moment of a

1 Gabrici 1911, 56.

2 For the expression *Rex vasorum*, see Iozzo 2018, esp. 13. In the aftermath of its discovery, the krater was already called the “Grande Vaso”: Marzi 2013, 21–26.

3 Gabrici 1911. Three fragments of the krater are left: A) almost the entire main decoration of side A, including a substantial section of the lip; B) a small section of the B-side, which shows the attachment of the handle and the lower limbs of a figure (probably a papposilenus), under which lies part of the meander decoration running from one handle to another; C) the whole inverted echinus foot, with a tiny part of the body; Rizzo 1925, 219–221. As Rizzo reports (1925, 218), the fragments were found by chance on the property of an inhabitant living in Buccino, the ancient Volcei, located in the present-day province of Salerno.

4 For the A fragment's depiction, see Gabrici 1911, 56–62; Rizzo 1925, 219 f.; Trendall 1936, 28–31; Trendall 1987, 94 f.



1

Fig. 1: Rape of Ajax. Fragment of calyx-krater signed by Assteas, around 350 BC. Buccino, Museo Archeologico Nazionale

play, whether of Athenian or local origin⁵. According to this line of thought, it would display all the ‘theatrical markers’ common to this group of paintings: “la riproduzione >architettonica< della scena, il >costume< dei fliaci, la loro maschera”⁶. However, it has also been suggested that the Paestan painter did not directly depict a specific episode from a play, but rather was indirectly inspired by the treatment of Cassandra’s rape in Attic tragedy⁷.

³ Partially diverging from this perspective is Oliver Taplin’s analysis of the piece⁸. He has argued that the fragment represents a case of paraiconography, i.e. an image parodying the respective canonical iconography⁹. However, his brief reasoning is conducted from an almost exclusively ‘negative’ perspective, highlighting why it is highly likely that the fragment does not directly reflect a play. Taplin in fact does not

5 Gabrici 1911, 60 f.; Bieber 1920, 146 no. 112; Pfuhl 1923, 718 f.; Rizzo 1925, 234. 237; Zahn 1931, 84 f.; Webster 1948, 23; Webster 1956, 112. 114 (who considers the play as Athenian in origin); Trendall 1967, 15. 54 f. no. 86; Pontrandolfo 2000, 121; Walsh 2009, 81; Schönheit 2019, 116. 127. 142 f. 197 no. P7. On ‘phlyax vases’, see Heydemann 1886; Trendall 1967; Green 2012. On the word “phlyax” and the literary fragments related to this kind of play, see recently Favi 2017.

6 Rizzo 1925, 234.

7 Sells 2020, 67 f.

8 Taplin 1993, 81 f.; Taplin 1994, 112. A first attempt to detach the image from any connection with staging and dramatic texts was made by Andreas Rumpf in 1951. He claimed that the scene is a parody of the epic narrative and that its caricatural nature is confirmed by the fact that the figures wear neither masks nor long-sleeved clothing (1951, 10). However, the scholar’s aim was not to provide a systematic analysis of the piece and his assumption is therefore not substantiated by a comparative analysis with the standard iconography.

9 For the notions of ‘paraiconography’ and ‘paratragedy’ in Taplin’s analysis, see Taplin 1993, 79–88; Taplin 1994.

compare Assteas' example with either the corpus of the phlyax vases or with the tradition of the rape of Cassandra through an operation of iconographic philology. Rather, a convergence with the 'philodramatic' position re-emerges in his judgement when, for example, he claims that the physiognomy of the figures "seems to be openly mask-like"¹⁰. Moreover, several arguments qualifying the fragment as a case of paraiconography do not appear to be effectively compelling. For instance, it is not made explicit how the presence of labels would indicate that Assteas added them "to make no mistake about the allusion of his paraiconography"¹¹. In other cases, it is Taplin himself who refers to inscriptions as an element to establish a direct connection between images and dramatic texts, both comic and tragic¹². Similarly, the scholar's observation that the iconographic tradition of the rape developed long before tragedy was established as an art form is not decisive. This argument does not consider the fragment's chronology, and is overly vague (Taplin himself has linked iconographies that have a broad tradition with specific dramas)¹³. While Taplin had the undoubted merit of shifting the perspective by calling the iconographic tradition into question, he did not provide a detailed examination of the image. For this reason, while the connection to the theatre has been frequently supported in recent times, Taplin's viewpoint remains rather isolated¹⁴.

4 As early as 1975, Moret wondered: "Dans ce débat à propos des sources de l'iconographie Italote, peut-on utiliser le témoignage du fragment phlyaque d'Astéas?"¹⁵. It is my intention in this paper to answer Moret's question, investigating the relationship between theatre and vase-painting by focusing on the Buccino fragment. Since it has not yet been carried out, the first aim of the contribution is to provide a detailed iconographic analysis of the piece.

5 In the course of the paper, three specific aspects will be investigated:

- I) The connection between the Buccino example and the southern Italian iconography of Cassandra's rape, focusing on points of interdependence and divergence
- II) The direct connection between image and drama and, in particular, the inclusion of the piece within the phlyax corpus
- II) The indirect relationship between image and drama and, in particular, the influence of literary sources on the image's creation

Assteas' operation will thus be deconstructed in order to achieve a better understanding of its sources and, more generally, of the vase-theatre dialectic.

10 Taplin 1993, 81; Taplin 1994, 112. Cf. also Taplin 1987, 108: "There are clearly comedy (or *phlyax*) from the masks, phallus etc., and they also clearly parody a familiar iconographic tradition".

11 Taplin 1993, 81; Taplin 1994, 112. Cf. Walsh 2009, 348 n. 42.

12 In relation to 'tragic scenes': "Quite a few of the mythological vases, especially the more monumental compositions by the Darius and Underworld Painters, include identifying name labels. While these often may simply add dignity and explanation, they do sometimes seem to indicate a connection with tragedy [...] But I see no clear index of when a label signals the presence of tragedy and when not" (Taplin 1993, 25). On this point, see also Taplin 2007, 40. 42 f. Referring to comic scenes, see e.g. Taplin 1993, 42: thanks to the identifying labels 'Phrynichus' and 'Pyronides' on a Paestan krater, probably referring to the famous Athenian musician (PCG fr. 155) and *strategos* (Eup. fr. 99), the scholar considers the scene as reflecting an Attic comedy.

13 A case in point is the Apulian calyx-krater attributed to the Branca Painter and depicting the liberation of Prometheus by Herakles (Berlin 1969.9). Taplin believes that the scene is related to Aeschylus' "Prometheus Unbound" (2007, 80–82 no. 18). But in this case, he overlooks the iconographic tradition relating to this episode, attested since the end of the 7th century BC. (LIMC VII [1994] 539–543 s.v. Prometheus [J.-R. Gisler]). The only factor in support of his interpretation would be the rocky archway to which the titan is chained, which according to the scholar is "a standard item of stage scenery" (80). In fact, there is no evidence that it is a staging element rather than an iconographic stylization employed by painters to render a rock in frontal view.

14 e.g. Walsh 2009, 81–85; Schönheit 2019, 116. 197 no. P 7; Sells 2020, 65–68.

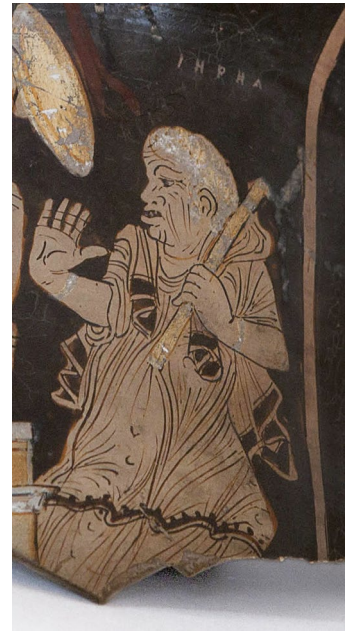
15 Moret 1975, 23 f. Cf. more recently Connelly 2007, 100.



2



3



4

Fig. 2: Ajax. Detail of the calyx-krater signed by Assteas, around 350 BC. Buccino, Museo Archeologico Nazionale

Fig. 3: Athena's statue. Detail of the calyx-krater signed by Assteas, around 350 BC. Buccino, Museo Archeologico Nazionale

Fig. 4: Priestess. Detail of the calyx-krater signed by Assteas, around 350 BC. Buccino, Museo Archeologico Nazionale

Shaping the *geloion*. The Subversion of the Iconographic Tradition

6 Three fragments of the calyx-krater are still preserved. Fragment A bears almost the entire decoration of the calyx-krater's main side (fig. 1). Starting from the left, we see a young female, with her hair gathered into a bun, grabbing the helmet of a male figure and pushing her knee onto his back. The man, dressed in a *linothorax*, clings to the central statue both by encircling it with his arms and gripping it with his legs (fig. 2). His face, with its contracted features and open mouth, shows a grimace of pain. At the center of the scene, on a multi-step base, is the statue of Athena, winking at the viewer¹⁶ (fig. 3). Finally, on the far right we find a horrified elderly woman, with white hair, deep wrinkles and few teeth, who flees from the statue while holding a temple key (fig. 4). The scene is explicitly identified as a parody of the rape of Cassandra by the presence of the goddess' statue, and assured by the inscription above the female figure, ΚΑΙΣΣΑΝΔΡΗ, the daughter of Priam and Ecuba.

7 As several scholars have already pointed out, the scene directly follows the setting of the rape as expressed in southern Italian vase-painting, the only difference being that the roles are reversed¹⁷. In most 4th century southern Italian vases, Ajax is making the typical gesture of grabbing the maiden by the hair, just as Cassandra in the Buccino fragment clutches the hero's three-pointed hat with her left hand. Similarly, in this case it is Ajax who embraces the statue of Athena with both arms, replicating Cassandra's act of supplication. Frequently found in southern Italian depictions of this episode, the priestess can be understood as one of the fleeing female figures which are an essential feature of rape's iconography¹⁸. She essentially represents an adaptation

16 For the characterization of Athena's statue in the southern Italian depiction of the rape, see Moret 1975, 14–16; Mugione 2002, 74–76.

17 Moret 1975, 11–27; Taplin 1993, 81.

18 On this point, cf. Moret 1975, 22 f. On rape's iconography, see Kaempf-Dimitriadou 1979; Stansbury-O' Donnell 2009.

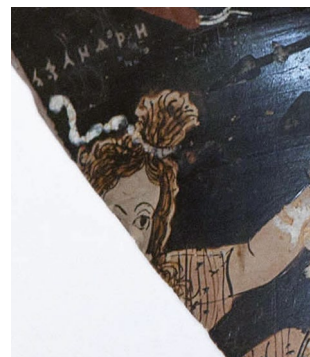
into the sacred context of the maidens already featured in Attic depictions of Cassandra's rape¹⁹. Even in this case, her gesture of raising the hand in fear is attested in the canonical record (fig. 5)²⁰. Besides relying on the canonical setting, there are also some iconographic details, such as clothing, that indicate how the Buccino krater fits within the southern Italian figurative tradition of the rape. The hooded shawl worn over the chiton by the Paestan priestess finds a useful comparandum to that which is bunched up around the neck of the equivalent figure depicted on an Apulian calyx-krater by the Taranto Group, dated to around 360–350 BC (fig. 5)²¹. Another point of close contact between the Paestan example and the 'serious' representations of the rape (in particular the Apulian and Campanian examples) is the 'translation' of Ajax and Athena's helmets in accordance with local costume. The hero wears a helmet of the Phrygian type which displays typically Samnite features, such as the crest at the apex, the white wings above the cheekpieces, and scroll-like terminations of the visor²². Athena's helmet is fundamentally the same as Ajax's: a Phrygian cap, with a plume at the apex, but on the sides, instead of wings, there appear to be feathers or two plumes similar to the one at the top²³. Therefore, Assteas seems to adopt the "correspondance entre la coiffe d'Ajax et celle d'Athéna" (be they Greek or Italic), which is typical of the southern Italian representation of the rape²⁴. The Paestan painter thus maintains the canonical iconography in its basic components, and shares with other southern Italian vase-painters relevant iconographic features that are useful for the figures' characterization.

8 However, there are a range of parodic features missing, or in contrast to the canonical iconography, aimed at increasing the effect of the scene. Although these choices contribute to increasing the inherently comical character of the scene, it is only by acquaintance with the figurative tradition that it is possible to fully appreciate their implications. Scholars have only outlined in general terms the parodic reversal of the scene and, consequently, have not paid particular attention to these aspects.

9 The first iconographic elements to be considered are Cassandra's hairstyle and gesture. Her hairstyle is characterized by extremely long locks that, on the sides of her face, fall down to her chest, but at the top of the head are gathered into a tuft tied by a white fillet (fig. 6). While specifying that there are no exact parallels for the treatment of the frontal bunch, Trendall suggested that it is presumably intended to parody some religious hairstyle²⁵. I believe that not enough attention has been paid to this insight.



5



6

Fig. 5: Rape of Cassandra. Apulian calyx-krater attributed to the Taranto Group, 360–350 BC. Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 52.665

Fig. 6: Cassandra's hairstyle. Detail of the calyx-krater signed by Assteas, around 350 BC. Buccino, Museo Archeologico Nazionale

19 As the available surface increased, the southern Italian painters introduced a new female figure, who in some cases replaces, and in others joins the fleeing maidens found in Attic production. On this specific point, see Connelly 1993, 113. Relevant Attic examples are: London E470 (LIMC VI [1992] 876 no. 311 pl. 582 s. v. Nike [A. Goulaki-Voutira]); Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 43 (ARV2, 1058.114; BAPD 213744). For southern Italian vase-painting, see: Taranto 52.665 (Moret 1975, 11–27 pls. 2. 3; Trendall – Cambitoglou 1978, 39 no. 24 pl. 12, 1); London F 160 (Moret 1975, 11–27 pls. 8–10; LIMC I [1981] 343 f. no. 59 pl. 262 s. v. Aias II [O. Touchefeu]). As Moret correctly pointed out (1975, 141), this figure is generally depicted in rape scenes regardless of the relative literary tradition (cf. e. g. London 1931.0511.1 [Trendall – Cambitoglou 1978, 416 no. 10 pl. 149, 1. 2; on this iconography, see Compatangelo-Soussignan 2001]).

20 On fig. 5, see n. 21.

21 Taranto 52.665 (Moret 1975, 11–27 pls. 2. 3; Trendall – Cambitoglou 1978, 39 no. 24 pl. 12, 1).

22 cf. Ajax's helmet on Capua 7554 (Trendall 1960); Halle 215 (Trendall – Cambitoglou 1982, 504 no. 87; Pouzadoux 2011). For their iconographic analysis, see Moret 1975, 11–27. For the different typologies of Samnite helmets, see Saulnier 1983, 59–72.

23 cf. the statue's helmet on the above-mentioned fragment from Halle and on London 1824.0501.35 (°LCS, 433 no. 538). On the southern Italian iconography of Athena wearing the phrygian helmet, see Cerchiai 2002. For helmets with central and lateral *lophoi*, cf. e. g. Cipriani – Longo 1996, 156 f. n. 61 fig. 61, 6.

24 Moret 1975, 15 f.

25 Trendall 1936, 29, recently also quoted by Walsh (2009, 83). Donald Sells (2020, 66) recently claimed to identify Cassandra's ribbon with the headband that is usually worn by the wife character in comedy. This correlation is in no way satisfactory: while the priestess has a tuft gathered by a ribbon at the front, the

Fig. 7: The Purification of Orestes at Delphi. Paestan squat-lekythos attributed to Assteas, around 350 BC. Paestum, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 4794

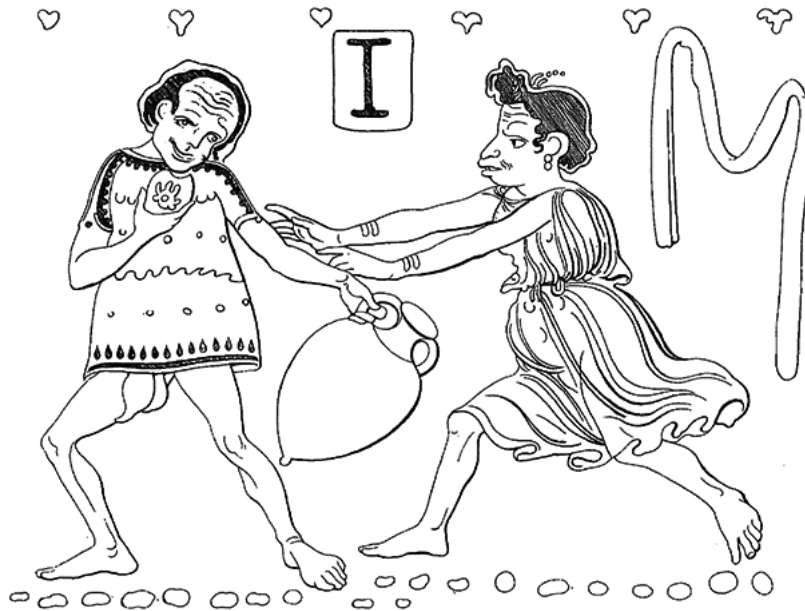


7

Fig. 8: Rape of Cassandra, detail of the fleeing priestess. Campanian hydria attributed to the Danaid Group, 340–320 BC. London, British Museum, inv. 1824, 0501.35



8



9

Fig. 9: Comic scene. Line-drawing of an Apulian bell-krater attributed to the Felton Painter, around 350 BC. Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. F 3047, now lost

First of all, the ornament worn by Cassandra shows a quite distinctive characterization: it is not a plain ribbon, but is in fact made from a series of beads, first more rounded then ellipsoidal, which end with dotted tips. Similar ribbons appear most frequently in sacral contexts, as can be seen in both Attic and southern Italian vase-painting. They can be worn by sacrificial victims (and are often found in combination with bucrania), hung in sacred areas, or displayed by priestly figures, such as Cassandra herself (fig. 7)²⁶. That

others show a wide band that collects the entire hair (see Green 2014a).

26 Sacrificial victims: Vienna IV 1144 (Attic; Bundrick 2014, 683 f.); Berlin 1984.41 (Apulian; Günther 2020, 84–90). Hung: Boston 95.25 (Attic; Bundrick 2014, 661); Paestum 4794 (attr. to Assteas; also around Apollo's laurel branch and the priestess' *phiale*; Trendall 1987, 109 f. no. 142 pl. 62a). On Apulian vases from the second half of the 4th century, priestly fillets are often found among Cassandra's attributes (fig. 7), such as the scepter or the laurel branch, but also over her hair, tied in various ways: see Roscino 2008, 294; Lo Piparo

the fillet worn by Cassandra in the Buccino fragment is of a sacral nature appears to be further supported by the fact that it appears close to the white ribbon tied around the temple key held by the old priestess, not only on the fragment itself, but also on several ‘canonical’ depictions of the rape (fig. 8)²⁷. In the Paestan example, however, the sacred ribbon is not used in a canonical manner. The priestess chose it to create an elaborate, coquettish hairstyle that recalls the complex headdresses characteristic of the *hetairai* on the so-called phlyax vases, but is also similar to the hairstyle adopted by women who are subject to caricature and therefore grotesquely ugly (fig. 9)²⁸. In both cases, the hairstyle is intended to increase their sexual appeal²⁹. On the Buccino fragment, Cassandra’s intent is quite the same, provoking the *geloion* predominantly in two directions: 1) she displays a lavish hairstyle that is inappropriate to her role and would rather qualify her as a *hetaira*; and 2) a sacral fillet is ultimately employed to fashion this hairstyle.

10 The other element to be investigated is the gesture made by Cassandra. Besides grabbing him by the helmet, she raises her left leg and presses her foot into the small of Ajax’s back (fig. 1). In southern Italian vase-painting, Ajax is never depicted as pushing his foot onto Cassandra’s back³⁰. In the case of the Buccino fragment, it is highly likely that Assteas wanted to enhance the violence of Cassandra’s action by adding the pressing of the “enemy’s” back to the hair/helmet grab and thus resuming the typical gesture of overpowering. This pose is, of course, very common and is mostly employed in fight scenes such as Centauromachy and Amazonomachy, in which Greek heroes, expressing the polis’ world, face feral creatures like the centaurs, or barbaric ones like the Amazons, who embody the inversion of the polyadic universe (fig. 10)³¹. Therefore, this gesture not only increases the violence, but also amplifies the subversion of the scene. In this case, a woman (specifically a priestess) performs the act typically undertaken by heroes to ‘tame’ the enemies of the polis, at the expense of the hero himself, who had attempted to rape her and perpetrate a high sacrilege. The use of this long-established iconographic scheme for the prophetess Cassandra is therefore particularly appropriate, and further enhances the parodic effect of the scene.

11 Two other features that have not been properly analyzed are the clothing and the gesture made by Ajax (fig. 2). As already mentioned, the hero wears a *linothorax*, under which is a sleeveless chiton. While in the southern Italian depictions of the rape Ajax is always represented in heroic nudity, here he is fully armed³². This choice is also unique within the figurative repertoire of the Paestan painter. All the

2017. A significant but rather isolated example in Attic vase-painting is a *kylix* attributed to the Codrus Painter (440–430 BC), where the same kind of fillet wraps Cassandra’s hair (Paris G 458; Mangold 2000, 56 f. fig. 35).

27 Ex Signorelli 231 (Moret 1975, pl. 7 no. 2); Geneva, priv. coll. (LIMC Suppl. I [2009] 293 f. no. add.I pl. 141 s. v. Ilioupersis [A. Kossatz-Deissman]); Vienna 724 (Moret 1975, pl. 11; Mantis 1990, 61 no. Ø8 pl. 26a); London 1824.0501.35 (Connelly 2007, 98–100 fig. 4.11).

28 For *hetairai*’s elaborate hairstyles on phlyax vases, see Green 2001, and cf. e. g. Copenhagen 15032 (on which, see Green 2001, 49–51). For examples of ugly women, cf. an Apulian krater by the Felton Painter (Berlin F 3047 [Trendall 1967, 30 no. 23; Taplin 1993, 43 no. 8]), almost contemporary to the Buccino fragment.

29 On *hetairai*’s lavish hairstyles and their functions, see Hawley 1998, 42 f. 50; Fischer 2008. Cf. also the old woman who has dressed up and adorned herself with cosmetics in order to attract a young man in the *Ecclesiastusae*: Ar. Ec. 877–905 (on which, see Taaffe 1993, 123 f.).

30 The only exception consists of three contemporary relief lekythoi (Zervoudaki 1968, 23 f. nos. 25–27 pls. 6, 1–4; 11, 1. 2; 27, 1–4). Two are of Attic production and have been found outside Italy. The third, from Ruvo, is of uncertain production; in fact, Zervoudaki does not explain the iconographic and stylistic reasons that should make this lekythos be considered Apulian (Zervoudaki 1968, 24); on this piece, see also LIMC I (1981) 345 no. 72 pl. 265 s. v. Aias II (o. Touchefeu). It is therefore more reasonable to exclude a direct association between these examples and the image on the Paestan krater.

31 On this scheme, see De Cesare 1997, 42–55, with bibliography. On the motif of the hair grab, see Moret 1975, 193–272. The gesture of overpowering is commonly employed in vase-paintings and sculptural cycles depicting Amazonomachy and Centauromachy. For the interpretation of Amazons and Centaurs as being antithetical to the polyadic world, see Schwab 2005, esp. 167 f. 173–183; Bremmer 2012 (for Centaurs’ wilderness); Stewart 1995; Castriota 2005 (for Amazons’ otherness).

32 For the iconography of Ajax, see Moret 1975, 20–24.



Fig. 10: Centauroromachy. Frieze of the Temple of Apollo, Bassae, 420–400 BC. London, British Museum, inv. 1815.1020.5 (526)

10

Greek heroes featured in his corpus, though wearing cloaks fastened at the shoulders by a pin or, as in the case of Herakles in the famous Madrid krater, even a transparent chiton, are in fact depicted as nude³³. It cannot therefore be ruled out that Assteas deliberately chose to dress the hero in full armor, thus departing from the figurative tradition. In this way, the painter achieves an even more immediate emphasis on the hero's cowardice, who, despite wearing a helmet and a cuirass, flees from the apparently harmless Kassandra. Besides the more obvious effect of this figurative choice, it should also be noted that in the traditional representation of the rape, it is a particular interest of painters to stress the vulnerability of the priestess's body. In most cases, her bust is entirely exposed or the breasts bare; in others, she wears a transparent chiton that clearly reveals the female form³⁴. As Larissa Bonfante has clearly shown, "women appear partially naked in mythological scenes in Greek art in moments of great danger, to indicate their weakness and vulnerability when exposed in this manner"³⁵. The partial nudity of the priestess, combined with her gesture of supplication, increases the pathetic appeal of the scene. The bareness of the suppliant woman, as attested in the serious iconography, is perfectly counteracted in Assteas' krater by Ajax's armor, which nevertheless fails to protect him from Kassandra's attack. From a sense of vulnerability and pathos, the painter turns to an admirably ridiculous effect: this is underlined not only by the hero's clothing, but also by the way he embraces Athena's idol. While in most depictions Kassandra abandons herself to the statue, kneeling in the typical scheme of the suppliant, Assteas' hero contrasts with this image by fully enveloping the idol not only with his arms but also his legs, contributing to a ridiculous portrayal of the mythological character³⁶.

12 The last parodic device I intend to discuss concerns the statue of Athena (fig. 11). The idol, seen from the front, performs a gesture that is virtually unique in ancient vase-painting: it winks³⁷. Nearly all scholars have mentioned the irreverent gesture of the statue, but none have attempted to investigate its visual implications and

33 Among the signed vases, see e. g. Naples 82258 (Trendall 1987, 95 f. no. 132 pl. 52); Madrid 11094 (Trendall 1987, 89–92 no. 127 pls. 46. 47). Among the unsigned ones, see e. g. Basel, Antikenmuseum, no inv. (Trendall 1987, 109 no. 141 pl. 61).

34 Moret 1975, 18 f.

35 Bonfante 1989, 560. Cf. Connelly 1993, 103.

36 For Kassandra's iconography, see Moret 1975, 16–20.

37 This is clearly confirmed not only by the raised right eyebrow, but also by the squinted left eye.

meaning in depth³⁸. Also in this case, the contrast with the serious iconography is clear. In 4th century vase-painting, the statue is depicted as being totally impassive towards the action taking place at its feet³⁹. Of course, Assteas' statue partly respects this mode of representation, considering its frontality and fixity while holding spear and shield motionless. But the winking, which represents a form of participation in the scene, breaks this detachment. In particular, this gesture parodically stands in contrast to the deliberately archaizing fixity of the gaze that characterizes many representations of the statue in the southern Italian panorama⁴⁰. Moreover, although we have no way of knowing whether Assteas was familiar with this version of the myth, the winking would reverse the gesture witnessed in some literary accounts of the rape. In these, Athena would either raise her eyes to the sky or close them to avert her gaze from the sacrilege⁴¹. Furthermore, as the literature has repeatedly emphasized, frontality enables a dialogue between the figure and the beholder of the object⁴². In relation to some modern paintings, Wollheim has observed that "there are pictures which do not ask us to identify with someone entering the represented space: rather we are expected to believe on the basis of what we see that a represented figure enters our space"⁴³. In ancient vase-painting, a similar approach has been adopted in analyzing frontal figures or faces, such as the famous case of Dionysos and Melpomene on the François Vase, or that exemplified by the eye-cups⁴⁴. Frontality is not only a formal device but is also meaningful in terms of experiencing the object, creating an interaction between representational content and viewers⁴⁵. Likewise, Athena's frontality and gesture directly involve the beholder in the event. But involve him in what respect? Is it possible to provide some suggestions as to the meaning of that wink?

13 The record of this gesture in Greek literature is rather problematic and, in many cases, not easily discernible. The verb most frequently translated as 'to wink' is ἐπιλλίξειν⁴⁶. However, the term derives from the noun ἰλλός which, as Steiner clarified, can refer to a gesture of the eyes that involves different types of movements according to the context⁴⁷. Moreover, this verb mainly recurs in epic literature in the sense of a shameful, reproachful glance that "has a role in verbal and physical strife preceding the restoration of order"⁴⁸. Considering the parodic character of the scene made by Assteas, certain references to the gesture in Latin literature, and in particular in the



11

Fig. 11: Athena's wink. Detail of the calyx-krater signed by Assteas, 350 BC. Buccino, Museo Archeologico Nazionale

38 Rizzo 1925, 233; Trendall 1936, 28; Trendall – Webster 1971, no. IV 30; Tendall 1987, 94; Taplin 1993, 81; Walsh 2009, 83; Sells 2020, 67. Contra Moret 1975, 16, which, however, completely disregards the squinted right eye and the arched right eyebrow.

39 see below.

40 On *eidola* representations in southern Italian vase-painting, see De Cesare 1997; Pouzadoux 2011.

41 Raised eyes: Lyc. 361 f.; Call. *Aet.* 1, fr. P. 35; Apollod. *Epit.* 5, 22; Q.S. 13, 422. Closed: Str. 6, 1.14. On these sources, see Robert 1918, 39–41.

42 Korshak 1987, 13, 42 f.; Hedreen 2007; Hedreen 2016, 205–207, 209.

43 Wollheim 1987, 185. The first part of the sentence concerns the distinction used by the scholar between the external and the internal spectator. The external spectator is the beholder of a painting in the actual space that the painting itself occupies. The internal one is an unrepresented spectator whose presence is made implicit by the gazes and gestures of the painted figures (101–104, 129 f.). In the case of the Buccino fragment, the frontality and the wink do not provide evidence for the presence of an internal spectator whose identity is defined. Rather, there is a direct dialogue between a painted figure (Athena) and the external spectator.

44 On the François vase's frontal figures, see Stewart 1983, 55 f.; Mackay 2001, 23–25, 31 f. On the eye-cups' interaction with the beholder, the classical reference is Boardman 1976, but see more recently Hedreen 2007. On frontal faces in Greek vase-painting, see also Frontisi-Ducroux 2012, 153–160; Hedreen 2016, 204–232.

45 Schapiro 1973, 37–39. For other references, see n. 44.

46 see e. g. Hom. *Od.* 18, 11 (Steiner 2010, 158); *h.Merc.* 387 (Vergados 2013, 485); A.R. 3, 791 (Green 1997, 133); 4, 389 (Hunter 2015, 136).

47 Steiner 2010, 158. Cf. also Russo et al. 1992, 48; Cairns 2005, 136. See also the different translations proposed for the same occurrence (*h.Merc.* 387) by Vergados (2013, 485) and Thomas (2020, 360 f.).

48 Lowry 1991, esp. 129.



12

Fig. 12: Woman/*hetaira* carrying a giant penis. Attic Red-Figure column-krater attributed to the Pan Painter, 470 BC. Berlin, Antikensammlung, inv. 3206

first comic production of the Republican age, appear more relevant⁴⁹. A famous fragment of Naevius' *Tarentilla* dealing with a 'shameless hussy' is of great interest⁵⁰:

Quasi pila

in choro ludens datatim dat se et communem facit.

Alii adnutat, alii adnctat, alium amat, alium tenet.

Alibi manus est occupata, alii pervellit pedem,

anulum dat alii spectandum, a labris alium invocat,

cum alio cantat, adtamen alii suo dat digito litteras.

As though she were playing at ball, give-and-take in a ring, she makes herself common property to all men. To one she nods, at another she winks; one she caresses, another embraces. Now elsewhere a hand is kept busy; now she jerks another's foot. To one she gives her ring to look at, to another her lips blow a kiss that invites. She sings a song with one; but waves a message for another with her finger.

14

The passage refers to the provocative attitudes of a woman in the midst of a group of men, offering herself as if she were in a ballgame (or the ball itself) here and there. Naevius is most likely portraying a *hetaira* on a sympotic occasion, lasciviously 'delighting' the various banqueters with flirts and effusions⁵¹. As on the vase: 1) the dynamics of the gesture, indicated by the verb *adnicto*, clearly refer to a wink; 2) it is done by a female figure; and 3) it seeks to establish a certain complicity with the person to whom it is directed. In two other passages by Plautus, which directly echo Naevius' text, the wink takes on the connotation of a lascivious gesture that aims to achieve complicity⁵². These texts therefore testify to how winking, in comic contexts, was often employed as gesture of lascivious seduction. Although dating to later than the calyx-krater, the possibility that these sources refer to earlier Greek texts, as has been recently remarked in the case of Naevius' fragment, should be kept in mind⁵³. It is therefore probable that the gesture made by Athena's statue, expressed in an equally humorous context, is a lascivious wink. Moreover, this interpretation would successfully fit with the action depicted. As Taplin and Walsh have rightly argued, the parodic reversal of the scene is truly achieved if the violence Cassandra is inflicting against Ajax turns into sexual assault⁵⁴. Since the example follows the canonical iconography, there is no reason to doubt that Cassandra's is a real rape. It is therefore a scene in which a woman (a prophetess in particular), fails to contain her sexual desire by raping a man inside a sacred place. The 'sex-crazed' woman, as Mitchell puts it, is a well-known visual and literary comic topos, with a long tradition (fig. 12)⁵⁵. Assteas' fragment, reversing the mythical version, echoes this comic topos, which does not necessarily appear to be tied to the theatrical world, but falls more broadly within the sphere of parodic-caricatural

49 On Roman Republican Theatre, see recently Manuwald 2011.

50 Naev. 74–79 W.; Spaltenstein 2014, 230–238; Perrone 2018. Transl. by E. H. Warmington.

51 Perrone 2018, 133.

52 Plaut. *Asin.* 784; *Merc.* 407. In the case of *Men.* 613, Maenechmos' wink does not have lascivious connotations; rather, it is a gesture of complicity. More generally, nods with eyes or eyebrows are some of the most frequently reported weapons of seduction in Latin literature. On lovers' secret gestures in Latin literature, see Kölblinger 1971, 24–43.

53 In the case of Naevius' *Tarentilla*, see Perrone 2018. For the influence of Greek staged symposia on Republican comedy, see Konstantakos 2005.

54 Taplin 1993, 81 n. 9; Walsh 2009, 83.

55 Mitchell 2009, 62–81; Mitchell 2015, esp. 168–172. For the treatment of this topos in comedy, see Gardner 1989; Stroup 2004, 56–62; Bierl 2009, 166. Cf. also London 1873.0820.276 (Lewis 2002, 203 fig. 5, 21), where we see an ordinary woman abducting a young man.

humor. From this perspective, Athena's gesture could be satisfactorily interpreted. Rather than "quizzical", "mischievous" or "surprised", I would interpret the Athena's wink as a lascivious, seductive look directed at the observer of the scene⁵⁶. The desire seems to bring the statue to life, in stark contrast to the virginity that is an intrinsic characteristic of Athena⁵⁷. Assteas' parodic reversal is again subtly accurate: the virgin deity par excellence is in fact portrayed as winking with malice at the observer. In the sympotic context for which the krater was probably intended, we must therefore imagine that a participant would have been the target of provocation by the statue of Athena, in a similar dynamic to the scene sketched by Naevius!

Comic Actors or Mythological Caricatures? Reassessing the Buccino Fragment

15 According to most scholars, the representation would feature iconographic 'markers' that clearly reference the apparatus of a theatrical performance – namely the architectural depiction of the scene and the actors' costumes, both in terms of masks and clothing⁵⁸. However, my aim is instead to support and confirm Taplin's suggestion that the fragment is a case of paraiconography, by reconsidering the relationship between the Paestan example and the phlyax vases.

16 In this respect, it is important to discuss the frame inside of which the image of the rape is displayed. All that is left is a thin vertical reserved band on the right, which joins at the top with another, similar band that runs all the way around the rim of the vase (fig. 1). These bands are usually interpreted as architectural elements, such as pillars and architraves⁵⁹. As similar pillars can also be found on a phlyax calyx-krater signed by Assteas, where we see four actors playing on a stage supported by Doric columns, Rizzo had suggested the provenance of these elements to a *logeion*⁶⁰. More generally, such framing structures on the sides of the main decorative field have been interpreted as a part of the stage setting⁶¹. However, it is necessary to point out that the presence of these pillars in Assteas', and more generally in Paestan production, is not necessarily associated with iconographies that are unequivocally dramatic in nature. On the contrary, we find this kind of architectural element in several vases that are clearly not related to or inspired by theatrical performances. Among the signed examples, a similar solution appears on the Cadmus bell-krater (fig. 13) and on the Hesperides lekythos in Naples, both of which feature mythological subjects with no apparent connection to the theatrical world, but it is equally possible to find these reserved bands on unsigned vases showing genre scenes⁶². Therefore, the depiction of this element does not imply any connection to the theatre.

17 No less problematic is the figures' iconographical characterization, as interpreted by most of the literature. Without providing any detailed analysis, the figures are regarded as actors, wearing the costumes and masks typical of the so-called phlyax

56 "Quizzical": Walsh 2009, 83; "mischievous": Taplin 1993, 81; "surprised": Gigante 1971, 46; "surprise or bemused interest": Sells 2020, 67.

57 For the detachment, cf. Sells 2020, 67.

58 see n. 5.

59 Rizzo 1925, 228; Trendall 1987, 95.

60 Rizzo 1925, 228. Berlin F 3044 (Trendall 1987, 84. 86 f. no. 125 pl. 44).

61 Trendall 1967, 13; Massei 1974; Gogos 1983, 59–70; Todisco 1990, 124; Bacilieri 2001.

62 Naples 82258 (Trendall 1987, 85. 95 f. no. 132 pl. 52); Naples 81847 (Trendall 1987, 86. 99–103 no. 135 pl. 57); Paestum 21135 (Trendall 1987, 119 f. no. 162 pl. 69d). This kind of decorative frame was inherited from the Sicilian Forerunners' iconographic language: cf. Denoyelle – Iozzo 2009, 183.



Fig. 13: Kadmus fighting against Thebes' dragon. Paestan bell-krater signed by Assteas, 360–350 BC. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 82258

Fig. 14: Comic scene with male actors courting a woman/*hetaira*. Paestan bell-krater attributed to Assteas, 360–350 BC. London, British Museum, inv. 1865, 0103.27

13

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Fig. 15: Oedipus and Creon before the Sphinx (considered to be wearing the mask of the 'wolfish woman'). Apulian oinochoe attributed to the Felton Painter, 375–350 BC. Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Ragusa coll., inv. 74

15

plays⁶³. However, taking Ajax into consideration, we see that there is no indication of the *σωμάτιον*, which Assteas depicts – without exception – to represent actors (fig. 14)⁶⁴. Instead, the Greek hero wears a plate cuirass under which he has a short-sleeved tunic (fig. 2). This specific treatment is not found in any other actor depicted by the painter, since the sleeves are always long (they reach below the wrist) and are well detailed through short folds. In addition, the lack of the typical padded costume is significant.

63 Rizzo 1925, 234; Trendall 1967, 54 f. no. 86; Trendall – Webster 1971, no. IV.30; Taplin 1987, 108. On comic actors' characterization, see Foley 2000; Green 2006; Hughes 2012, 178–231.

64 cf. Gabrici 1911, 60.

Specifically, the position of the legs, tightened around the statue, makes it possible to exclude the presence of the *phallòs*, the artificial red penis typically worn by actors. Cassandra and the priestess also do not wear theatrical costumes⁶⁵. Not only are they shown clothed in short-sleeved garments, but their dresses feature decorative patterns commonly attested in the Paestan corpus, such as the dot-stripe border on the priestess' cloak (fig. 4) or the black stars embroidery on Cassandra's chiton (fig. 1)⁶⁶.

18 In addition to the use of theatrical costumes, nearly all scholars assume that the figures depicted wear masks⁶⁷. Relying on the classification created by Webster, Trendall recognizes three specific types of masks: RR for Cassandra, D for Ajax, and U for the old priestess⁶⁸. However, this approach is problematic in several respects. For example, the mask typology associated with Cassandra is that of the "wolfish woman", found on phlyax vases and described by Pollux as old, with a yellow complexion and many thin wrinkles⁶⁹. The figures on the phlyax vases indeed show a prominent nose, deep wrinkles and arched eyebrows (fig. 15)⁷⁰. As can be inferred from the complete lack of wrinkles and the flowing hair, Cassandra does not have an elderly face, nor is her color different to that of the other figures (fig. 1). Moreover, although placed alongside the fracture, it is not possible that she had a particularly prominent nose⁷¹. Cassandra's face cannot therefore be associated with this type of mask. Instead, it is highly unlikely that she is actually wearing one. Although comic actresses seem to be very rare in the Paestan corpus⁷², it is nevertheless meaningful that female masks, mainly depicted as hanging, are always clearly recognizable by their white color⁷³. To my mind, other details point out that in this case the characters' faces are exaggeratedly and grotesquely deformed rather than being concealed by masks: the presence of well-detailed teeth on both Ajax and the priestess, rarely found on masked characters⁷⁴; the lack of a white eyelid on the hero's face, which is always visible on the masks of comic actors' (cf. fig. 14); and the wrinkles around the neck of the priestess. Even the rendering of Ajax's enormously dilated lips, which Gabrici ascribes to the typical phlyax mask, is in this case more likely dictated by the hero's pained expression⁷⁵.

65 Walsh's recent suggestion (2009, 84), accepted by Sells (2020, 66), that the intervention of the priestess with her exaggeratedly large key, believed to be a theatrical prop, is indeed an indication of a theatrical influence appears to be untenable. The priestess' key is not actually increased in size when compared to those held by the same figure in the canonical tradition: cf. Taranto 52.665 (Trendall – Cambitoglou 1978, 39 no. 24 pl. 12.1).

66 This kind of elaborate pattern is due to the special attention paid to the clothes' decoration by Assteas when painting his signed vessels. On the dot-stripe border, see Trendall 1987, 13. 59. 61. 88; for the embroidered black stars, cf. Montesarchio, no. inv. (Trendall 1987, 85. 92–94 no. 129 pls. 49–51a); Paestum 20202 (Trendall 1987, 86. 98 f. no. 134 pls. 55. 56).

67 The only exception is Rumpf 1951, 10: "This is not the representation of a theatre scene, for none of the figures have sleeves or masks". On comic masks, see Bernabò Brea – Cavalier 2001, 55–72. 160–267; Hughes 2012, 166–177.

68 For this categorization, see Webster 1949; Webster 1956, 200; Webster 1969, 7–12; Trendall 1967, 12 f. For the Buccino fragment, see Trendall 1967, 55 no. 86.

69 Poll. 4, 150–151: [150] [...] τὸ μὲν λυκαίνιον ὑπόμηκες ῥυτίδες λεπταὶ καὶ [151] πυκναὶ λευκόν, ὑπωχρον, στρεβλὸν τὸ ὄμμα. For this mask, see Webster 1949, 103; Webster 1969, 10.

70 cf. e. g. Berlin F 3047 (Trendall 1967, 30 no. 23; Taplin 1993, 43 no. 8); Amsterdam 2513 (Trendall 1967, 60 no. 105 pl. IXg); Taranto, MAN, coll. Ragusa, inv. 74 (Trendall 1967, 62 f. no. 115 pl. VIIIb; Walsh 2009, 208 no. 109 fig. 82a. b).

71 The right side of the face is preserved: if the nose were prominent, part of it would be still visible. See e. g. Taranto, MAN, coll. Ragusa, inv. 74 (Trendall 1967, 62 f. no. 115 pl. VIIIb; Walsh 2009, 208 no. 109 fig. 82a. b).

72 However, it is possible that the frequently depicted female figures protruding from windows (Trendall 1987, 12), often featured in comic scenes in the company of male actors, are in fact actresses: e. g. Città del Vaticano 17106 (Schauenburg 1972, 11 f.; Trendall 1987, 124 f. no. 176 pl. 73a. b). This would be suggested in particular by the face's white color, typical of female masks. However, the question deserves further investigation.

73 see Vienna, priv. coll. (Green 2014b). The hanging masks are an iconographic feature inherited from the Sicilian Forerunners: Trendall 1987, 42.

74 The only exceptions in Assteas' corpus are the robber Gymnilos on the Berlin calyx-krater (F 3044 [Trendall 1987, 84. 86 f. no. 125 pl. 44]) and the citharist Phrynis on the Salerno bell-krater (Pc 1812 [Trendall 1987, 64 f. no. 19 pl. 20c–d]).

75 Gabrici 1911, 57.

19 After a detailed analysis of the representation, no iconographic element could be identified that would make the presence of masks, costumes or a stage structure certain. On the contrary, a better contextualization of the scene in the Paestan corpus has made it possible to isolate iconographic choices that differ from those usually employed in phlyax scenes, as well as a particularly realistic rendering of many details, which suggest that the figures painted by Assteas are not actors but the proper characters of the mythological narrative. This raises the question about the relationship between the Paestan fragment and the corpus of the phlyax vases and, more generally, about the iconographic devices used by painters to create comic images. Thematically, our example is indeed comparable with other scenes found in the corpus, which likewise rely on the paradoxical overturning of a mythical episode⁷⁶. However, while phlyax vases are heavily based on scenic fiction (at times breaking it through metatheatricity, as Giuliani has rightly pointed out), our example belongs to a group of southern Italian vase-paintings that is characterized by the absence of any kind of scenic fiction and display caricature, i.e. the grotesque distortion of facial and body features⁷⁷. On an eminently visual level, the type of comic fiction (i.e. the way the *geloion* is established) is therefore different from that achieved by phlyax vases⁷⁸. In the case of the Buccino fragment, both Ajax and the old priestess are caricatured: Ajax's face is full of wrinkles, with a disproportionately large nose, unkempt hair, beard and even eyebrows; the priestess' is shriveled and overall unattractive (which the toothless detail contributes to)⁷⁹. Although a comprehensive study of this type of imagery is still lacking, it is relevant to point out that many of these caricatural vases are in fact paraiconographies, thus displaying a more or less close relationship with canonical scenes, and mock well-known mythical episodes⁸⁰. According to this, I therefore suggest that one of the main targets of these caricatures is to betray the viewer's 'horizon of expectation' by depicting what is *para prosdokian*⁸¹. On an Apulian chous featuring the theft of the Palladium, Odysseus and Diomedes have ugly features and enormous bellies that contrast with the paradigm of the heroic body (fig. 16)⁸²; on an oenochoe showing the encounter between Oedipus and the Sphinx, the latter takes on the horrid features of an old woman with sagging skin, and ambiguously combines masculine and feminine sexual attributes (fig. 15)⁸³; on an apparently ordinary offering scene to a herm, the statue is replaced by Hermes himself, who has a beer-belly and is ithyphallic because a woman hangs wreaths on his member⁸⁴. While on phlyax vases this phenomenon is limited, since the scenic fiction is well highlighted, caricatural vases engage the viewer through visual incongruity in order to provoke laughter. In some cases, they achieve this even on the same vase. A Lucanian *pelike* with Herakles carrying the Kerkopes is exemplary in displaying the striking contrast between

76 Webster 1948, 21–23; Trendall 1967, 15–18; Taplin 1993, 82 f.; Walsh 2009, 90–92. 140 f. 181. 216 f.; Schönheit 2019, 35 f. 115 f. 142–144; Günther 2021, 211 f.

77 The few bibliographical references dealing with this topic in the southern Italian context are Rizzo 1926; Mitchell 2009, esp. 34. 150–156; Walsh 2009, 245–253; Günther 2020, 96. For Attic vase-painting, see Lissarrague 2000; Mitchell 2004, 15–19; Mitchell 2009. For scenic fictionality and metatheatricity on phlyax vases, see Taplin 1993, 67–78; Compton-Engle 2015, 23–30; Giuliani 2018, 111–115; Günther 2020, 93–96; Günther 2021, 202 f.

78 Albeit through a different process, both types of images tend to represent that ugliness (*aischros*) which, according to the famous Aristotelian definition (Arist. *Po.* 1449a. b), is inherent to the *geloion* and corresponds to the object of comic representations.

79 Contrast the priestess on the San Antonio's nek-amphora signed by Assteas: San Antonio 86.134.168 (Trendall 1987, 85 f. 96–98 no. 133 pl. 53).

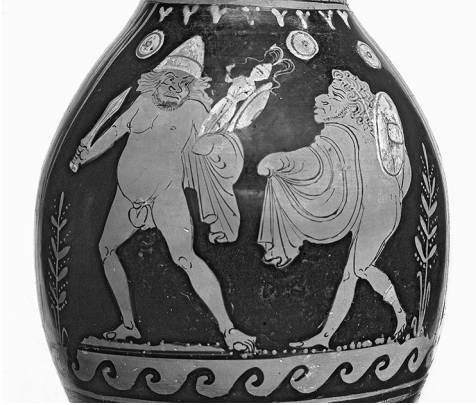
80 see Mitchell 2009, 150–156.

81 For the concept of 'horizon of expectation', see Jauss 1982. In the artistic field, see Gombrich 1969, esp. 60. For the unexpected as a comic device, see Kanellakis 2020.

82 London 1844.0409.9 (Trendall – Cambitoglou 1978, 177 no. 94; Walsh 2009, 92–94 no. 99 fig. 20; Mitchell 2020, 179–181). On the Felton Painter, see Trendall – Cambitoglou 1978, 172–179.

83 Taranto, Ragusa coll. 74 (Mitchell 2009, 153).

84 Kiel, Priv. Coll. (°LCS, Suppl. III, 69 no. BB30; Mitchell 2009, 155).



16



17

the heroic body of the hero and the distorted, grotesque features of the mischievous dwarfs-like brothers (fig. 17)⁸⁵. Without applying the filter of the theatre, they essentially invite the viewer to define how the characters grotesquely differ from their canonical ‘counterparts’.

Fig. 16: Odysseus and Diomedes seize the Palladion. Apulian oinochoe attributed to the Felton Painter, 380–360 BC. London, British Museum, inv. 1884.0409.9

Fig. 17: Herakles and the Kerkopes. Lucanian pelike, around 380 BC. Malibu, Getty Villa, inv. 81. AE.129

Comparing Literary and Iconographic Evidence

20 Having established that the Buccino fragment does not explicitly represent a theatrical scene, it still remains to be clarified whether a connection between literary models and iconographic representation can be traced. Although its existence has been hypothesized, we have no ancient comedy that deals with a parody of Cassandra’s rape⁸⁶. From another perspective, Sells has recently suggested that the image of Assteas could be an example of paratragedy, i.e. a comic scene that parodies a tragic episode⁸⁷. Recognizing the implausibility of performing Cassandra’s rape on stage, he proposes that Assteas was inspired by an indirect dramatic representation of the episode, probably achieved through its description in a messenger speech⁸⁸. In this regard, Sells mentions the tendency of 4th century southern Italian pottery to depict tragic episodes that were only reported by a messenger onstage⁸⁹. According to this line of thought, one indicator of the tragic origin of these images would be the inclusion of a messenger or a similar figure, such as a *paidagogos* or a herdsman⁹⁰. However, this position is problematic

85 Malibu 81.AE.189 (Walsh 2009, 179–181).

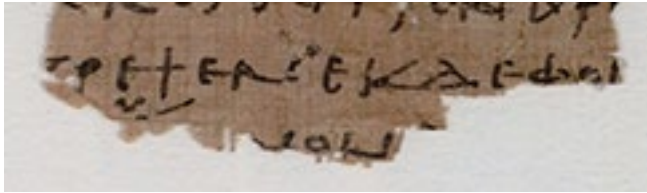
86 Sells 2020, 67. Cf. Webster 1948, 23.

87 Sells 2020, 67. See also Trendall 1967, 15. For the notion of ‘paratragedy’ in vase-painting, see n. 9.

88 On the figure and role of the messenger in Attic tragedy, see Barrett 2002, esp. 56–101; Dickin 2009; Budelmann – van Emde Boas 2020.

89 Sells 2020, 67. Cf. Taplin 2007, 24 f.; Budelmann – van Emde Boas 2020, 62–67.

90 see esp. Green 1996; Green 1999.



18

Fig. 18: P.Oxy.XLIV 3151. Detail of the w. 9–10

from several points of view. First, the rape's canonical iconography in southern Italian vase-painting does not feature a messenger or similar figure, hence there is no evidence that this hypothetical description of the violence was reflected in the artistic field⁹¹. Second, this character is not attested in the literary tradition, nor is his intervention in the scene to inform about Cassandra's violence.

21 Several scholars believe that Sophocles' *Ajax*

Locrus played a significant role in the creation and development of the rape's iconography⁹². Webster, following Zielinski's hypothesis that she was one of the characters in the drama, proposes to identify the old priestess found on the vases with Theano, the Trojan priestess of Athena⁹³. However, as Moret points out, we have no literary source that allows us to establish whether Theano played a role in the rape, and no evidence of her inclusion in Sophocles' tragedy⁹⁴. The background to this figure is instead purely iconographic, as shown in the first chapter. If we take into consideration what remains of the tragedy, we see that only the fragment 10c Radt, bearing the *rhesis* of Athena, refers to the violence⁹⁵:

A]ΘΗΝΑ ποίου Δρύαντος κείνος ἐγγόν[οις ξυνών
 Τροίαν ἐπεστράτευσεν, Ὠργεῖοι; τ[ίς ἦν
 ὃς τᾶργα ταῦτα πρὸς θεοὺς ἐμή[σατο;
 5 μῶν τῶν ἔνερθεν ἐξανέστηκ[εν μυχῶν
 ὁ βυρσοφώνης Ζηνὶ Σαλμωνε[ὺς πρόμος;
 τίν[ος ποτ' ἀνδρό]ς εἰκάσω τάδ' ἔργ[ματα,
 ὅστι[ς μ' ὑβρίζων ἐμόν] ἀκόλλητον βρέ[τας
 κρηπίδος ἐξέσ]τρεψεν, ἐκ δὲ φοι[βάδα
 10 ἔσυρε βωμοῦ παρθέ]νον [θεῶν βία;

Descendants of what Dryas were his companions when he launched his expedition against Troy? Who was he who performed these actions against the gods? Has Salmoneus, who made himself a voice by means of hides, risen from the caverns of the underworld to challenge Zeus? What sort of man can I guess was author of these deeds, the man who in his insolence wrenched headlong from its base my image, not fastened there, and dragged the prophetic maiden from the altar in defiance of the gods?

22 More specifically, the small section of the text does not contain any exposition of the event, but rather a comparison between Ajax's deed and two other mythical acts of impiety towards the gods, which allows the audience to frame the hero's *hybris* in defiance of the goddess. Only the last four verses, which are subject to an extensive (and much discussed) integration, mention the statue being wrenched from its base and, likely, the dragging away of Cassandra from the image of Athena (fig. 18)⁹⁶. Besides ad-

91 Moreover, the value of this figure as a tragic 'marker' has recently been questioned: Giuliani 2018, 110; Adornato 2022.

92 Webster 1967, 146 f.; Sutton 1984, 9; Connelly 1993, 88 f.

93 Webster 1967, 146 f.; Zielinski 1925, 40 f.

94 Moret 1975, 22 f.

95 Haslam 1976; Sutton 1984, 7; Mazzoldi 2001, 35 f. The other surviving fragments seem to dwell on the settlement of Ajax's violation, probably through a trial, and finally, on his punishment: see Sutton 1984, 7–9. The text follows Lloyd-Jones' edition and translation (1996).

96 For vv. 9–10, three integrations have been suggested: 1) Radt (reported by Haslam in apparatus [1976, 8]) suggests completing these verses with the F 15a, transmitted by Herodianus: x--(-x--(-) τῆς φοίνικος <(-x--(-)--> | ἔτρυξε πληγῆς τίτανος ἀρχαίω ποδί (TGF 4, 122). This proposal would suppress any indication of Cassandra's presence in the tragedy. In addition to presenting several formal issues (see Haslam 1976, 8), it is not clear why Ajax would strike a blow at the statue's feet. Moreover, it would be the first time that the

ding nothing specific to the mythical tradition, this very limited mention does not justify, to my mind, the relationship that scholars establish between tragic text and vase images⁹⁷. Furthermore, it is relevant to point out that the fragment, and more generally the literary sources of the 6th and 5th centuries, focus on the hero's outrage against Athena's sacred place, rather than on the violence towards Cassandra⁹⁸. As Mazzoldi has rightly shown, it is only from the Hellenistic period onwards that the sexual violence becomes impiety itself and, therefore, the hero's true guilt⁹⁹. In vase-painting, it is possible to witness a similar development in terms of narrative focus¹⁰⁰. However, it is worth highlighting a significant chronological gap between the two media. While in black-figure examples the scene is fundamentally centered on the struggle between Ajax and Athena (fig. 19), with the first red-figure pieces there is a change in the focus of the iconography. Cassandra acquires new relevance, increasing in size and becoming the fulcrum of the scene, while Athena, now depicted as a statue that assumes an increasingly detached attitude to the event, loses importance (fig. 20). Since the end of the 6th century, the image focus is no longer the *hybris* of Ajax towards the goddess, but the violence committed by the Achaean hero against the prophetess, exemplified by their physical and visual contact. The diachronic comparison between iconographic and literary language shows how they follow an independent development, rather than a pattern of strict dependency on each other. On the basis of my analysis, I therefore consider it unlikely that, as Sells claims, Assteas made a parody out of the tragic representation of the episode, since we have no significant evidence concerning its staging and, furthermore, the two media seem to follow a different evolution. Rather than assigning a top-down role to any particular text, it is instead relevant to point out that the Buccino fragment engages a multi-faceted relationship with comedies in terms of shaping the comic discourse. The three most evident devices shared by Assteas are:

23 1) the comical inversion of well-known mythological episodes. As Nesselrath has remarked, this solution is particularly dear to the authors of the Middle Comedy¹⁰¹. For instance, comparable to the Paestan example would have been Alexis' *Odysseus Weaving*, in which, in all likelihood, the Homeric hero is found performing Penelope's own task and thus providing a hilarious reversal of roles¹⁰². Moreover, in this case the social hierarchy between genders also seems to be effectively subverted.

24 2) Paratragedy. The painter does not merely create a parodic representation of the mythical episode itself, but also shapes an image that expresses the comic inversion of the traditional iconography of the rape. In doing so, he carries out an operation that, in essence, corresponds to the dramaturgical-literary process of comic writers who parody famous tragic episodes. In these cases, the lens of comic deformation is turned

term *titanos* was applied to a statue; 2) Luppe (1977, 738): ἐκ δὲ Φοῖ[βάδα ἔσυρ' ἔχουσιν ξόα]νον ἀ[γκάλαις βί]α;. Taking into account the papyrus, the *xoanon* integration is quite problematic on two fronts: one would not expect an *omicron* under the breve sign, and the space reserved for the *alpha* seems to be too large (cf. Haslam 1976, 8; pace Luppe 1977, 738); 3) Lloyd-Jones (1996, 14 f.): ἐκ δὲ φοῖ[βάδα ἔσυρε βωμοῦ παρθένον] [θεῶν βί]α;. *Parthenon* suffers from the disadvantage of having too many letters before the *ni*. Moreover, no other literary or iconographic source records Cassandra being dragged away from an altar.

97 In archaic literature, the episode is reported in the epic poem *Ilioupersis* (Bernabé *PEG* 1, 15–18) and in fragment 298 Voigt of Alcaeus (on which, see Liberman 1989).

98 cf. Mazzoldi 2001, 36. Moreover, the presence of Cassandra as *dramatis persona* is not directly recorded. Indirect evidence could be the repetition of KA[at the beginning of three verses in fr. 10e, and the content of fr. 15, reported in Zenobius' *Centuriae* (Vulg. 6, 14), where an anonymous character asks: "What has Apollo played (κεκίθαρκεν) for you on the lyre?". Cf. E. Tr. 69–71, where the outrage against Athena, which is similarly reflected in the 'dragging' of Cassandra (ἠνίκ' Αἴας εἶλκε) and thus in the violation of the right of asylum (ὄβρισθεῖσάν με καὶ ναοῦς ἔμοῦς), is the focus of the passage (cf. Mazzoldi 2001, 36).

99 Mazzoldi 2001, 48.

100 Moret 1975, 11–13; Connelly 1993; De Cesare 1997, 87–89; Mazzoldi 2001, 40–46; Oricchio 2002.

101 Nesselrath 1990, 188–204.

102 Olson 2007, 318.



19

Fig. 19: Rape of Cassandra. Attic Black-Figure Amphora attributed to the Group E, 540 BC. Munich, Antikensammlung, inv. 1380



20

Fig. 20: Rape of Cassandra. Detail of the so-called hydria Vivenzio, attributed to the Kleophrades Painter, 480 BC. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. M 1480

on the language, characters, plot and staging of specific tragedies, establishing an interplay of references that increase the comic effect of the piece¹⁰³.

25 3) The distortion of physical appearance through caricature. Although the stage costume is undoubtedly the main medium through which grotesque body deformation is conveyed, at times other kinds of devices were employed to offer detailed and extremely hostile accounts of an individual's ugliness¹⁰⁴. For example, in both *Wasps* and *Peace*, Aristophanes provides a caricatured image of Cleon's body, metaphorically applying features of famous mythological creatures such as Cerberus and Typhon by mentioning the jagged teeth, burning eyes, a voice like a torrent-stream, the foul stench, unwashed testicles, and the camel's anus¹⁰⁵.

26 In this sense, a comparison with the literary evidence allows us to highlight once again the complexity of Assteas' operation and, more generally, the ability of southern Italian painters to combine different comic tools in a manner that is rather similar to that of playwrights.

103 For Aristophanes, see Bonanno 1987. More generally, see Farmer 2017 (with bibliography).

104 On the interplay between text and costume in comedies, see Compton-Engle 2015, 16–58.

105 Ar. V. 1030–1035; Pax. 754–758; on which see Sommerstein 2009, 167–170; Franco San Román 2019.

Conclusions

27 Despite being at the center of the debate on the problematic relationship between drama and vase-painting for more than a century, the Buccino fragment has never been investigated through an in-depth iconographic analysis. Although Moret and others have shown how crucial the iconographic tradition is in the construction of vase images, seldom has a philological study of comic and tragic scenes been conducted¹⁰⁶. This absence is mainly due to the fact that these types of images have been approached from the users' point of view¹⁰⁷. In order to settle the issue of the model underlying Assteas' parody, it has been necessary to above all look back at the image itself and its identifying iconographic features. The comparative analysis with the canonical tradition has made it possible to highlight, for the first time, not only how the image is rooted within it, but above all the parodic devices employed by the painter. The comic overturning is not in fact confined to the role inversion, as previously thought; it also concerns the iconographic treatment of Cassandra, Ajax and the statue of Athena. In Cassandra's case, the comic effect is primarily achieved by the unusual employment of sacral fillets to give shape to a "*hetaira*-like" hairstyle that in no way suits her sacral role, but also by the typically 'heroic' scheme used for her gesture of violence against, paradoxically, a Greek hero. The latter seems to be further ridiculed by the choice to depict him wearing a cuirass, which in this case does not seem to defend him in any way from the priestess' attack, and by his position, with his legs wrapped around Athena's idol. Finally, the winking gesture made by the statue not only seems to constitute an iconographic break with the normally progressive detachment from the action found in the vase-painting tradition, but also overturns the gesture of raising the eyes to the sky or looking away from the scene, as witnessed by ancient sources focusing on the episode. Moreover, reflecting on the interaction between frontality and contextual access to the image, it has been suggested to interpret the wink as a lascivious, seductive gaze directed by the (virgin) statue at the viewer of the krater. Assteas has been able to shape the canon by adding or modifying iconographic details, adopting specific motifs, and exploiting the opportunities offered by frontality in order to involve the viewer in the story. The contextualization of the fragment within the southern Italian vase-painting tradition of the rape proposed here has therefore placed the painter's authorship back at the heart of the matter¹⁰⁸.

28 This has also been achieved by challenging the assumption that the fragment depicts a theatrical scene or was indirectly inspired by the tragic account of the rape. Thanks to a comparison with the features expressed by the corpus of the phlyax vases and the work of Assteas, it is now possible to conclude that the figures are not wearing theatrical costumes or masks, and that the structure that frames the scene is not an allusion to a theatrical stage, but rather a decorative choice. By contrast to the corpus of the phlyax vases, Assteas' example must therefore be inscribed within a parodic-caricatural iconographic strand of southern Italian painting that presents comic reversals of well-known iconographies, and in particular mythical episodes. While the phlyax vases rely on scenic fiction and a large part of their point "lies in the pleasure of the recognition

106 Significant exceptions are Moret 1975; Aellen et al. 1986; Giuliani 1996; Small 2003, 47–71; Fontannaz 2008; Moret 2013; Günther 2020.

107 Taplin's words illustrate this well, both in relation to tragic images: "But it is my thesis that the viewers of these vases, with their experiences of mythological narratives, have to be brought into the picture. It is not the mentality of the producer/painter that is at issue so much as that of the perceiver" (2007, 25, but cf. also 2, 24); and comic ones: "A large part of the point of these pictures lies in the pleasure of the recognition of the scene, and in the 'riddles', which only make sense to someone who is familiar with the play. This sort of 'narrative key' to the scene-specific comic vases sets up a complicity between painter and viewer" (1993, 90, but cf. also 32).

108 cf. Moret 2013, 172; Grilli 2015, 102–106.

of the scene”, the caricatural vases appear to be playing on the betrayal of the ‘horizon of expectations’ of the viewer through visual incongruity¹⁰⁹. As it is beyond the scope of this paper, this will have to be substantiated in a future, comprehensive study of this specific type of images.

²⁹ Adopting an approach that overcomes the strict dichotomy between the ‘iconocentric’ and ‘philodramatic’ perspectives, the literary evidence and its possible relationship with vase-painting has then been investigated. An examination of the literary data, and in particular of the surviving fragments of Sophocles’s *Ajax Locrus*, has shown that we must be more cautious when assigning to them a top-down role in the development of the rape’s iconography. Broadening the perspective and diachronically comparing the treatment of the episode in the two media, it has also been shown that the focalization on the various protagonists follows a different development. Although there is no direct interplay between literary and iconographic language, the brief comparison between Assteas’ operation and some of the most widespread devices employed in comic literature has shown that the dynamic in shaping the *geloion* is structurally similar. This reveals the southern Italian painters’ ability to develop their own sophisticated language, which stands “on the same interpretative plane” as written sources¹¹⁰. The degree of iconopoietic skill is further enhanced by the fact that the Paestan example engages with the traditional representation of Cassandra, in both literary and iconographic sources. What Cassandra epitomizes, both narratively and in a more symbolic sense – i.e. her compliance with the role of priestess, the necessity to preserve virginity, and the bitter fate of being an unheard and therefore excluded prophetess – is admirably reversed by this extraordinary depiction¹¹¹. Thanks to the out-of-the-ordinary possibilities offered by the comical sphere, we witness a woman who is completely indifferent to the sacred place in which she finds herself, and to the inviolability of the suppliant – a sexually active prophetess, and ultimately a female who is antithetical to male domination.

³⁰ As with so many other images from the southern Italian and Sicilian corpus, the interpretation of the Buccino fragment has been severely constrained for more than a century by the heavy assumption of theatrical influence¹¹². As a result of this first in-depth analysis, it has been possible to liberate this important archaeological evidence from its subordination to the textual/theatrical medium and to unleash its full informative potential and extraordinary originality.

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¹⁰⁹ For the quote, see Taplin 1993, 90.

¹¹⁰ Ferrari 2002, 61 f.

¹¹¹ For Cassandra’s prophecies and role, see Mazzoldi 2001, 13–23. 93–290; Doyle 2008. As a virgin, see Debnar 2010. As an unheard prophetess, see Dillon 2009.

¹¹² cf. Osborne 2008.

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