

Both Sides Now: Aphrodite, Eros, and Makron's Bigamous Helen

In this paper I will discuss the images on both sides of a well-known skyphos painted by Makron and located in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (13.186). These images depict the beginning and end of the Trojan War as signified by Helen's relationship with two men—her lover Paris and her cuckolded husband Menelaus, king of Sparta. More specifically, I want to discuss how these images generate meaning in dialogue with one another and with other images to which they are explicitly or implicitly related. I will argue that Makron paradoxically represents Helen as an embodiment of chaste marital *philia* in the company of her paramour, Paris, and as an embodiment of unbridled *eros* in the company of her husband, Menelaus.

Side A of Makron's vase shows Paris leading Helen away from Sparta. Paris is preceded by Aeneas while Helen is followed by Aphrodite and Peitho; a winged Eros flutters between Paris and Helen. Despite the curious fact that the bridegroom is armed and apparently striding off to war, various features in this image are paralleled in representations of the wedding ceremony on Attic vases of the early classical period (Oakley and Sinos). In this wedding procession on foot (*chamaipous*), Helen is dressed as a bride, while her attendant Aphrodite adjusts her veil, and the groom Paris grasps her wrist in the *cheir' epi karpo* gesture, which is also familiar from scenes of abduction (Jenkins)—an association that is especially appropriate for this pseudo-marriage, whereby Paris whisks Helen away from her true husband. Tawdry circumstances aside, the glance that the bride and groom share (both looking down modestly) helps to create a "romantic mood" that Oakley and Sinos consider to be characteristic of Early Classical representations of red-figure wedding scenes.

Side B of the vase fast-forwards us to the end of the war and the reunion of Helen with Menelaus, a frequent topic in Attic vase painting; Makron's rendition belongs to the "pursuit-

and-flight” type most popular during the second and third quarters of the fifth century (Dipla). To some extent the image recasts the “wedding” of Paris and Helen on Side A. The focus is once again on the interaction between Helen and a man armed for war, in the company of several observers, including Aphrodite in the role of attendant, who once again reaches her arms out towards Helen’s head (perhaps neatening her coiffure, as Hedreen suggests). Also present, behind Aphrodite, are two characters familiar from book one of the *Iliad*: Chryses, priest of the Apolline sanctuary to which Helen is fleeing, and his daughter Chryseis, Agamemnon’s war prize, whose surrender led to his fateful quarrel with Achilles. Eros is notably absent, at least in the divine manifestation visible on Side A.

Helen’s flight from Agamemnon reverses the movement of Side A, where she appears to accompany Paris willingly; an even more striking reversal concerns Helen’s demeanor and garb. Paris’ “bride” is modestly dressed, with her eyes demurely downcast; while fleeing from Menelaus, Helen opens her *himation* to reveal a transparent *chiton* that leaves nothing to the imagination. Helen herself gazes directly at Menelaus, whose gaze however is fixed on his wife’s genitals. Comparison with other treatments of Helen’s recovery by Menelaus is illuminating on this point. The eye contact of the protagonists is an “indispensable” feature in the pictorial treatment of the scene from black-figure onwards (Dipla), yet in Makron’s version Helen’s gaze goes unmet, and Menelaus’ eyes direct ours towards Helen’s nether regions. Even though Makron may regularly (as Hedreen claims) draw the contours of women’s bodies beneath their clothing, even when physical beauty or seduction seems irrelevant, in this instance the painter appears to call attention to the effect that Helen’s sexuality has on Menelaus. In a scene pointedly less romantic than that of Helen’s “wedding” to her lover Paris on Side A, Helen’s genitalia seem to embody the earthy, earthly power of the divine Eros.

Works Cited

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