



Figure 1. Sarcophagus from Gümüşçay, ca. 510–490 B.C.E.: General three-quarter view. Proconnesian marble. Çanakkale, Museum. Photo: After *Studia Troica*, courtesy University of Tübingen.

# “A tomb both great and blameless”

## *Marriage and murder on a sarcophagus from the Hellespont*

RICHARD NEER

You have the Pyrrhic dance as yet;  
Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone?  
—Byron, “*The Isles of Greece*”

In the summer of 1994, archaeologists working at Troy were alerted to an illegal excavation near the village of Gümüşçay, about forty-five miles northeast of Troy. Here, on the banks of the Granikos River, somebody had destroyed a grave tumulus.<sup>1</sup> On discovering that the site had already been robbed in antiquity, the looters took whatever remained (if anything) and cleared out, leaving ruination in their wake.

The tumulus—what the Greeks would have called a “sign,” or *sēma*—overlooked the Sea of Marmara, much like the mound that godlike Hector imagined for one of his victims in the seventh book of the *Iliad*:

But his corpse I will give back among the strong-benched  
vessels  
so that the flowing-haired Achaeans may give him due  
burial  
and heap up a sign (*sēma*) over him beside the broad  
Hellespont.  
And some day one of the men to come will say, as he  
sees it,  
one who in his benched ships sails over the wine-dark sea:  
“This is the sign of a man who died long ago in battle . . .”<sup>2</sup>

or for that matter like the Tomb of Achilles himself, as described in the twenty-fourth book:

---

I am grateful to the participants and audience at the ISAW conference, as well as to an audience at Cornell University, for comments on this paper. Special thanks to C. Brian Rose for helpful information and to Froma Zeitlin for advice about tragedy (though neither can be blamed for what follows).

1. On the tomb see N. Sevinç “A New Sarcophagus of Polyxena from the Salvage Excavations at Gümüşçay,” *Studia Troica* 6 (1996): 251–264; C. B. Rose et al., “Granicus River Valley Survey Project, 2004–2005,” *Studia Troica* 17 (2007): 65–133, esp. pp. 78–81. On the Granikos Valley tombs see *ibid.*; C. B. Rose, “The Tombs of the Granicus Valley,” in *The Achaemenid Impact on Local Populations and Cultures in Anatolia (Sixth–Fourth Centuries B.C.)*, ed. I. Delemen et al. (Istanbul, 2007), pp. 247–264.

2. Homer, *Iliad* 7.84–89, trans. Lattimore (modified). On this passage see G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, 1979), pp. 338–343. Visibility of sea from tumulus: Sevinç (see note 1).

. . . a tomb that was both great and blameless,  
on a jutting promontory there by the wide Hellespont,  
so that it can be seen afar from out on the water by men  
now alive and those to be born in the future.”<sup>3</sup>

There is even some evidence that the men who raised this mound were alive to its epic overtones. Inside were parts of a chariot and horses, a familiar enough feature of heroic burials in archaic Greece.<sup>4</sup> At the core was a sarcophagus of Proconnesian marble, surrounded by stacks of terracotta tiles for protection; the looters left it behind because it was too heavy to move. The lid takes the form of an Ionic roof; this conceit is not so unusual in the Greek east, where a sarcophagus is often a house without a door.<sup>5</sup> But one gable was left uncarved, and there was almost no paint anywhere on the sarcophagus. Maybe the money ran out.

All four sides of the box bear figural scenes in low relief; the figures are about eighty centimeters high (figs. 1–2). Style suggests a date of around 500 B.C.E., give or take a decade or so, making it by far the earliest carved Greek sarcophagus.<sup>6</sup> The front shows a horrific episode from the Trojan Cycle (fig. 3). Following the sack of Troy, the ghost of Achilles appeared from his tomb and demanded the blood of the Trojan princess Polyxena as a libation. Reluctantly, his son Neoptolemos obeyed. This story made the closing scene of the *Ilioupersis* by Arktinos of Miletos, and was retold by the poets Ibykos, Stesikhoros, and Simonides; later it would form a central event of Euripides’ *Hekabe* and several other tragedies.<sup>7</sup>

---

3. Homer, *Odyssey* 24.80–84, trans. Lattimore (modified).

4. It is unclear whether the harness of these horses was Greek or Persian, and also whether the chariot had or had not been modified to serve as a wagon. But see Rose et al. (see note 1), p. 249.

5. See I. Hitzl, *Die griechischen Sarkophage der archaischen und klassischen Zeit* (Jonsereid, 1991).

6. For the new, slightly later date, which still might be a bit early, see Rose et al. (see note 1), p. 78.

7. Stesichorus S135 Davies; Ibykos F307 Davies; Simonides S557 Page. For recent treatments of the story see R. Scodel, “Δόμῳ ἄγαλμα: Virgin Sacrifice and Aesthetic Object,” *TAPA* 126 (1996): 111–128; J. Bremmer, “Myth and Ritual in Greek Human Sacrifice: Lykaon, Polyxena, and the Case of the Rhodian Criminal,” in *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice*, ed. J. Bremmer (Leuven, 2007), pp. 55–80, esp. pp. 59–65. On the iconographic tradition, O. Touchefeu-

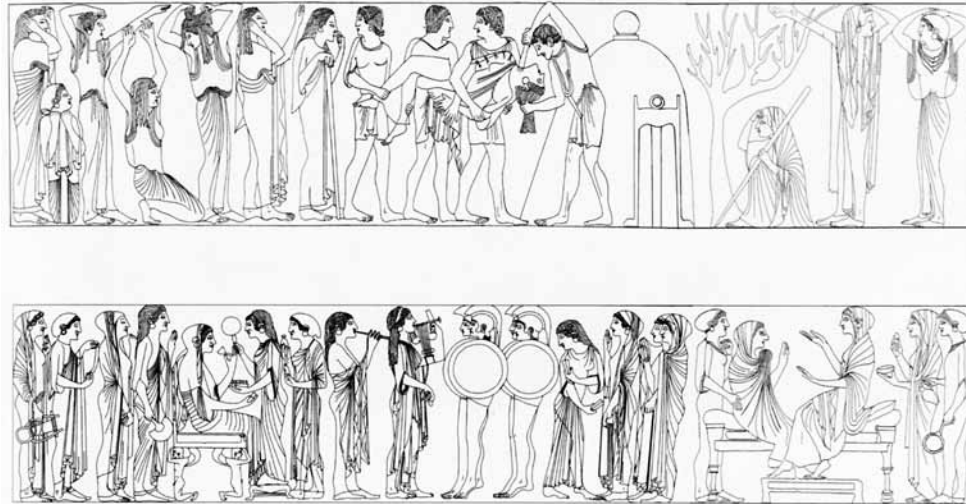


Figure 2. Sarcophagus from Gümüşçay: Drawing. After *Studia Troica*, courtesy University of Tübingen.

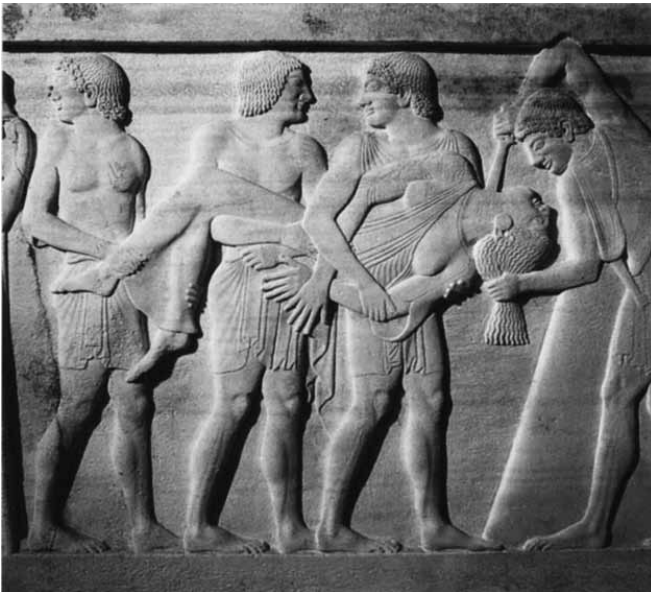


Figure 3. Sarcophagus from Gümüşçay: Front view. Photomontage prepared by Richard Neer, after *Studia Troica*, courtesy University of Tübingen.

Here we see three Greeks holding the kicking girl, as her sisters and other ladies of Troy weep and wail; an older man watches and holds his nose. Neoptolemos looks Polyxena in the eye as he plunges home the blade. In the background rises the grave-mound of Achilles, adorned with a tripod and a phallic marker of a sort known

from the Troad and Lydia.<sup>8</sup> This scene wraps around to one of the short ends, where there are more mourners, including an old woman, her face lined with crow's feet: doubtless Hekabe, Queen of Troy and mother of Polyxena. A leafless tree overhead is one of those examples of the pathetic fallacy that turn up every so often in early Greek art.<sup>9</sup>

The Sacrifice of Polyxena was never a popular scene in Greek art, and there exist few parallels. An Attic amphora of the mid sixth century confirms the identification of the scene in its broad outlines (fig. 4).<sup>10</sup> But that pot is a unicum and a bit odd in any case. Although it provides labels for the figures, they don't make much sense: Two of the men holding Polyxena bear the names of Trojans! That said, the amphora does include an older onlooker in long robes: Nestor, elder statesman of the Greek army. He may appear on the sarcophagus as well, as the older man standing by Polyxena's feet. The amphora also omits the tomb of Achilles. Polyxena is being sacrificed over a

Meynier, "Polyxena," *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae* 7, no. 1 (1994): 431–435; G. Schwarz, "Der Tod und das Mädchen: Frühe Polyxena-Bilder," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung* 116 (2001): 35–50.

8. C. Roosevelt, *The Archaeology of Lydia from Gyges to Alexander* (Cambridge, U.K., 2009), p. 153.

9. Pathetic fallacy: J. Hurwit, "Palm Trees and the Pathetic Fallacy in Archaic Greek Poetry and Art," *Classical Journal* 77 (1982): 193–199.

10. Athenian black-figure amphora, Tyrrhenian Group (Timiades Painter). London, British Museum 1897.7–27.2 (BADN 310027), ca. 575–550 B.C.E.



Figure 4. Athenian black-figure amphora, Tyrrhenian Group (Timiades Painter), ca. 575–550 B.C.E.: Sacrifice of Polyxena. London, British Museum 1897.7-27.2. Photo: author.



Figure 5. Klazomenian sarcophagus, late sixth century B.C.E.: Polyxena led to sacrifice. Leiden I.1896/12.1. Watercolor after Cook 1981.

burning altar, which is emphatically not what Achilles demanded in any of our sources: He wanted her blood for a libation, not her roasted flesh for consumption. The painter has been carried away by the conceit that Polyxena is being butchered like a cow, and forgotten the difference between burnt offerings and liquid ones, *thusia* and *enagisma*. Achilles's tomb does appear, however, on a late sixth-century terracotta sarcophagus

from Clazomenae on the coast of Asia Minor, now in Leiden: Neoptolemos leads Polyxena to her fate (fig. 5).<sup>11</sup> He holds her by the wrist, the traditional way

11. Leiden I.1896/12.1; R. M. Cook, *Clazomenian Sarcophagi*, Kerameus 3. (Mainz, 1981), G.8. I am grateful to my student Ann Patnaude for bringing this sarcophagus to my attention. Compare also an Attic black-figure hydria of the Leagros Group, Berlin, Antikensammlung F1902 (BADN 302032).

for a bridegroom to lead his bride: For the sacrificed virgin, death is a form of marriage.<sup>12</sup> Our sculptor might have combined these two strands of the iconographic tradition. Interestingly, another sarcophagus from Clazomenae may show the actual sacrifice itself. It bears scant resemblance either to the Athenian amphora or to the sarcophagus in Leiden: Warriors simply cut down a girl.<sup>13</sup> The difference lends some plausibility to the idea that the sculptor may have been inspired by imagery from the Greek mainland.

The other two sides of the sarcophagus are more mysterious (fig. 6). One long side shows a female seated on a throne with legs shaped to look like Eros, or Love. She holds a flower in one hand, an egg in the other. Female attendants to either side bring perfume, a necklace, a mirror, a fan, and a plate of eggs. At right are a female piper, a female cithara player, a chorus of four pyrrhic dancers (that is, dancers in armor), a female castanet dancer, and three more female onlookers. Around the corner, on the short side, a veiled woman sits on a couch before a seemingly younger female (fig. 7). Three more feminine attendants stand nearby, one with a pitcher and strainer (?), another with a phiale and an egg.

This half of the sarcophagus is far more controversial than the front; but the contrast between a murdered girl on the one hand, and feminine luxury on the other, has escaped no one. It is as though the world of epic and the world of Sappho have collided. The trouble is, we don't really know who any of these women are. Goddesses? Mortals? Ancestors? Moreover, the narrative thread—if there is one—is harder to follow; there are few iconographic clues. Some scholars see the whole ensemble as ritual veneration of ancestors or commemoration of the deceased, or both.<sup>14</sup> Others divide it into three groups: a bride's preparation for marriage at left; a religious festival at right; and a feminine banquet on the short sides.<sup>15</sup> So we shall have to do a bit of sleuthing to figure out what is going on.

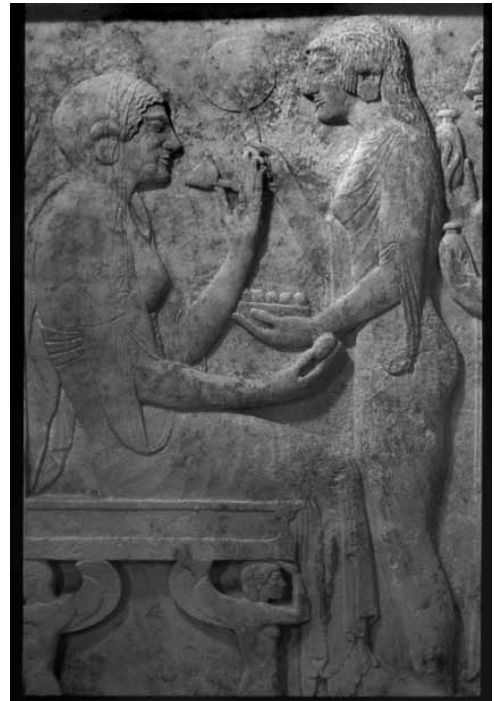


Figure 6. Sarcophagus from Gümüşçay: Back view, detail of enthroned female and attendants. Photo: after *Studia Troica*, courtesy University of Tübingen.

### Man or girl?

Dominating all accounts of the sarcophagus to date has been a crucial piece of information concerning its contents. The initial excavation report (1996) stated that it contained the bones of a young girl, aged ten or so.<sup>16</sup> It even went so far as to note, suggestively, that the modern name of the tumulus was *Kızöldün*, or “Dead Girl Hill.” This report has cast something of a spell on all subsequent discussions. For it is difficult, armed with this information, not to be moved by the poignancy of the sacrificial scene, and indeed of the entire ensemble, with its strikingly “feminine” iconography. The connection between the dead girl and Polyxena becomes inescapable, and the sarcophagus comes to seem a precious document in the history of Greek women.

Or maybe not. In 2001 the excavators reported the results of a proper osteological analysis of the sarcophagus's contents.<sup>17</sup> It turned out that the occupant

12. Berlin, Antikensammlung F1902; BADN 302032. Cf. Euripides, *Hekabe* 523. On the sacrifice of virgins as a marriage, see N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. A. Forster (Cambridge, MA, 1991), pp. 36–42.

13. Berlin 3348; Cook (see note 11), G.29.

14. For example D. Steuernagel, “Ein spätarchaischer Sarkophag aus Gümüşçay, im Museum von Çanakkale. Ikonographische Beobachtungen,” in *Archäologische Studien in Kontaktzonen der antiken Welt*, ed. R. Rolle and K. Schmidt (Göttingen, 1998), pp. 65–177; Rose et al. (see note 1).

15. C. Reinsberg, “Der Polyxena-Sarkophag in Çanakkale,” *Olba* 4 (2001): 71–99; C. Reinsberg, “Der Polyxena-Sarkophag in Çanakkale,” in *Sepulkral- und Votivdenkmäler östlicher Mittelmeergebiete*, 7. Jh. v.Chr.–1. Jh. n.Chr. *Kulturbegegnungen im Spannungsfeld von*

*Akzeptanz und Resistenz*. Akten des Internationalen Symposiums Mainz, 1.–3.11.2001, ed. R. Bol and D. Kreikenbom (Mönnese, 2004), pp. 199–217.

16. Sevinç (see note 1).

17. N. Sevinç et al., “A New Painted Graeco-Persian Sarcophagus from Çan,” *Studia Troica* 11 (2001): 402. For a girl's burial that was



Figure 7. Sarcophagus from Gümüşçay: Side view, women. Photo: after *Studia Troica*, courtesy University of Tübingen.

was not a little girl at all, but a middle-aged man. This was a revelation. Suddenly, the scene on the front becomes rather more sinister. For it is clear that *Polyxena* is not the one who resembles the dead person. On the contrary, the character that most resembles the deceased, the character to whom the deceased is being compared, can only be *Achilles*, the recipient of this bloody libation. Seen in this light, in fact, there emerges a basic affinity between the depicted tumulus in the background, and the real, literal tumulus that was heaped over the sarcophagus. What we have here is a real tumulus near

Troy, and inside that tumulus there is a real sarcophagus. Carved onto that sarcophagus is a virtual tumulus near Troy. Inside the *virtual* tumulus, invisible to us, are the ashes of Achilles. But inside the real sarcophagus are the bones of a dead man.

So powerful was that initial report, however, that much of the scholarly community has simply refused to accept the new information. Nobody, of course, actually denies the osteological evidence. Instead, people have found a way around it, by arguing that the sarcophagus cannot possibly have been intended for a man.<sup>18</sup> The

sunk into the same tumulus in the mid-fifth century, see N. Sevinç, C. B. Rose, and D. Strahan, "A Child's Sarcophagus from the Salvage Excavations at Gümüşçay," *Studia Troica* 9 (1999): 489–509.

18. F. H. Massa-Pairault, "Vanth et la tombe François: Adrasteia et le sarcophage de Gümüşçay," in *Hommages à Carl Deroux*, vol. 4 (Brussels, 2003), pp. 186–199; Reinsberg (see note 15, both titles); K.



Figure 8. Harpy Tomb from Xanthos, ca. 480–470 B.C.E.: Enthroned females, processional *korai*, bovines. London, British Museum. Photo: author.

iconography is just too “feminine.” Perhaps it was made for a woman and then appropriated by a man, under circumstances that remain obscure. Or maybe it was reused, as often happened in imperial Rome. Such ad hoc reasoning then licenses interpretations of the iconography in terms of girls’ coming-of-age ritual, cults of Artemis, and the like. No fewer than four articles taking this position have appeared within the last six years, and it is safe to call it the consensus view.

But perhaps we should not be so quick to discard data that do not fit our theories. We should at least try to take seriously the archaeological evidence—such as it is—and with it the less pleasant features of the iconography. There is no trace of an original, feminine occupant in the archaeological record, nor is there any evidence to suggest that the tumulus was reopened and the sarcophagus reused. However much we may wish to sympathize with Polyxena—and the work itself seems to invite this response—the challenge is to see how it could make sense, in Greek terms, to honor a forty-year-old man with imagery of this sort. The need seems all the more pressing given that the Sacrifice of Polyxena had an established place in eastern Greek mortuary iconography, as the sarcophagus from Clazomenae demonstrates. This is the hand we have been dealt.

### The iconography of the reverse

Before delving into the Polyxena scene, let us turn to the reverse of the sarcophagus. The iconography here is mysterious in its own right. It is tempting to associate

Geppert, “Überlegungen zum Polyxena-Sarkophag von Çanakkale,” in *Tekmeria: Archäologische Zeugnisse in ihrer kulturhistorischen und politischen Dimension. Beiträge für Werner Gauer*, ed. N. Kreuz and B. Schweizer (Münster, 2006), pp. 89–102, esp. p. 100; Rose et al. (see note 1), p. 252.

the seated woman with enthroned females on eastern Greek grave stelae and on a late archaic monument from Xanthos known as the Harpy Tomb (fig. 8).<sup>19</sup> The trouble is that none of these comparanda are surrounded by attendants like the woman on the sarcophagus. One of the females on the Harpy Tomb receives a procession of *korai*, adopting the formula of votive reliefs. The woman on the sarcophagus, by contrast, sits in the midst of a crowd; she does not have the characteristic remove of a goddess, and the narrative context seems quite distinct. In any event, the identities of the females on the Harpy Tomb are utterly obscure, so the analogy would be of little help even if it were more precise. Ionian stelae, meanwhile, show women alone; again, there is not the crowd of attendants that we see on the sarcophagus.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the closest analogy is a recently discovered Greco-Persian stele from Daskyleion, dated to the early

19. Steuernagel (see note 14); Geppert (see note 18). On the Harpy Tomb see most recently C. Rudolph, *Das Harpyien-Monument von Xanthos: Seine Bedeutung innerhalb der späarchaischen Plastik* (Oxford, 2003); H. Froning, “Das sogenannte Harpyienmonument von Xanthos: ein Beispiel für Akkulturation im südwestlichen Anatolien,” *Nürnberger Blätter zur Archäologie* 19 (2002–2003): 137–158, esp. pp. 150–151; C. Draycott, “Bird-Women on the Harpy Monument from Xanthos, Lycia: Sirens or Harpies?” in *Essays in Classical Archaeology for Eleni Hatzivassiliou 1977–2007*, ed. D. Kurtz (Oxford, 2008), pp. 145–153. On Ionian grave stelae see H. Hiller, *Ionische Grabreliefs der ersten Hälfte des 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Tübingen, 1975); E. Pfuhl and H. Möbius, *Die ostgriechischen Grabreliefs* (Mainz, 1977).

20. The difference between the imagery on the sarcophagus and ordinary sepulchral iconography emerges in the contrast with an early sixth-century gravestone from Chalcedon, which shows a seated woman surrounded by attendants, much like the sarcophagus. Behind the deceased, however, stands a woman in an attitude of mourning—exactly what does not appear on this part of the sarcophagus. On the stele see Hiller (see note 19), pp. 140–141; and Pfuhl and Möbius (see note 19), cat. no. 1.

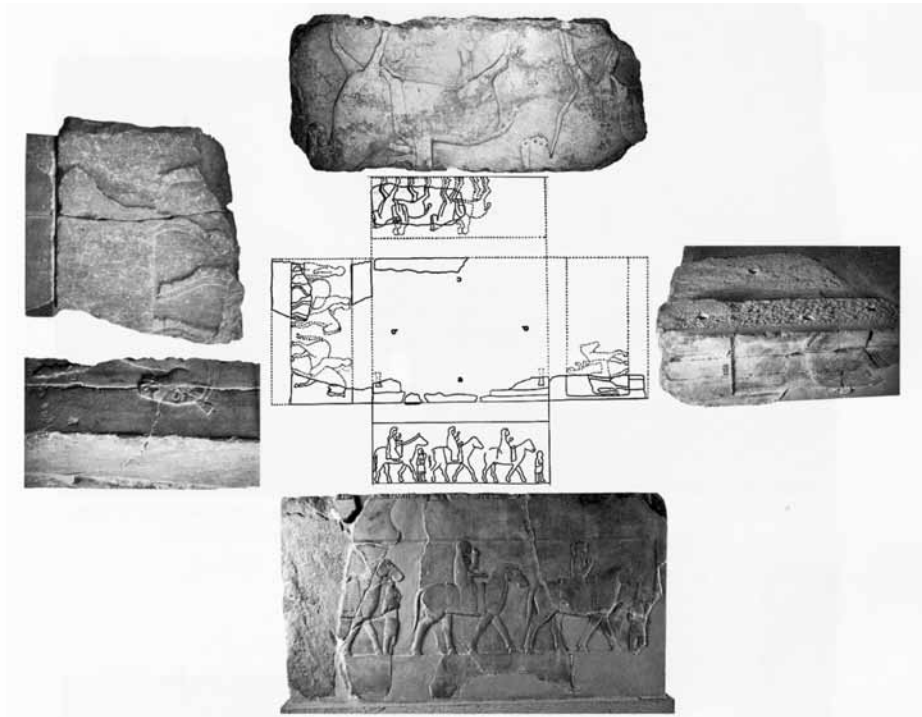


Figure 9. Greco-Persian grave stele from Daskyleion, early fifth century. Photo: after *Studia Troica*, courtesy University of Tübingen.

fifth century (fig. 9).<sup>21</sup> Like the sarcophagus, this stele shows an enthroned woman surrounded by attendants. But these attendants are holding distinctly Persian items, like a flywhisk, which do not appear on the sarcophagus. It is also much cruder in its workmanship. Might it be that our sculptor had seen a relief of this sort, or something like the Harpy Tomb, and translated its iconography into a Greek idiom?

Fortunately, an altogether closer analogy may be found in the iconography of weddings on Athenian vases, in which the adornment of the bride is a stock theme.<sup>22</sup> The German scholar Carola Reinsberg has made this point in a superb discussion of the Polyxena Sarcophagus.<sup>23</sup> On pieces like a well-known epinetron by the Eretria Painter, a cluster of attendants surrounds and adorns the seated bride (fig. 10).<sup>24</sup> The gifts vary—

there are no eggs in Athenian weddings, for example—but the general composition and the narrative of adornment match up far better than the processional scenes on the Harpy Tomb; note especially that one of the women on the sarcophagus is bringing a necklace, that is, dressing her up.<sup>25</sup> That the throne on the sarcophagus has legs in the form of Eros, god of love, seems to cement the association.

Having identified the woman as a bride, Reinsberg suggests that the armed dance at right is part of a ceremony in honor of Artemis, and the scene on the short side is a visit to the bridal chamber on the morning after.<sup>26</sup> The result would be a left-to-right sequence, following the bride's progress from maidenhood into womanhood. Interestingly, that same epinetron by the Eretria Painter has a visit to the newlywed bride on its reverse side as well.

Reinsberg's suggestion has much to recommend it. But a bit of caution may be in order when it comes to

21. On the newly discovered relief see G. Polat, "Daskyleion'dan Yeni bir Anadolu Steli," in Delemen et al. (see note 1), pp. 215–224. On the Greco-Persian reliefs generally see M. Nollé, *Dekmäler vom Satrapensitz Daskyleion* (Berlin, 1992).

22. Reinsberg, "Der Polyxena-Sarkophag in Çanakkale," in *Sepulkral- und Votivdenkmäler östlicher Mittelmeergebiete* (see note 15), pp. 206–208.

23. Reinsberg (see note 15, both titles).

24. Athens, NM 1629 (BADN 216971).

25. On Athenian wedding iconography see J. H. Oakley and R. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison, 1993).

26. Reinsberg, "Der Polyxena-Sarkophag in Çanakkale," in *Sepulkral- und Votivdenkmäler östlicher Mittelmeergebiete* (see note 15), pp. 208–213.





Figure 10. Attic red-figure epinetron by the Eretria Painter, ca. 420 B.C.E.: Nuptial scene. Athens, National Museum 1629. Photo: author.

the part about a dance in honor of Artemis. It is certainly true that a dance for Artemis could be appropriate to a rite of passage, and there does exist a classical Attic pyxis showing a solo pyrrhic dancer before a statue of the goddess.<sup>27</sup> But the fact that Artemis herself does not appear on the sarcophagus must count against this idea. There is simply no visual evidence whatsoever to suggest that this dance honors any deity at all, still less that it honors Artemis in particular. Moreover, on analogy with the Polyxena scene on the front, it would be preferable to take this entire side as a single unit rather than to divide it into two separate scenes—adornment and cultic dance—as Reinsberg does.

Before offering an alternative, however, I have to take up one of Reinsberg's more ingenious suggestions. She argues, sharply but not altogether convincingly, that the four armed dancers are in fact female.<sup>28</sup> The idea is not implausible, as female pyrrhicists do occur in Greek art, and a chorus of young girls would be appropriate to Artemis.<sup>29</sup> More specifically, there are three points in favor of the idea that the dancers on the sarcophagus are female.

- First, female pyrrhic dancers wear shorts (*perizōma*).<sup>30</sup> Male pyrrhicists are usually nude (but

27. Naples, Museo archeologico 81908 (BADN 3831).

28. Reinsberg, "Der Polyxena-Sarkophag in Çanakkale," in *Sepulkral- und Votivdenkmäler östlicher Mittelmeergebiete* (see note 15), pp. 209–210.

29. C. Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece*, trans. D. Collins and J. Orion (Lanham, MD, 2001).

30. On *περιζώμα* see A. Kossatz-Deissmann, "Zur Herkunft des Perizoma im Satyrspiele," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 97 (1982): 65–90, esp. pp. 72–74.

can wear a short tunic in rare cases); they never wear shorts. The dancers on the sarcophagus seem to wear shorts, like the females.

- Second, the young men on the front of the sarcophagus have short hair, and all the women have long hair. The dancers have long hair, hence should be female.
- Third, in Attic vase painting, female musicians rarely if ever accompany male dancers, but routinely accompany female dancers. Here, the musicians are female, so the dancers should be as well.<sup>31</sup>

However, there are strong objections to this thesis.

- First, the girls' pyrrhic was not a choral dance but a solo one.<sup>32</sup> The only evidence, literary or iconographic, for a *female* pyrrhic chorus is a black-figure cup showing Amazons in Thracian attire, dancing with crescent-shaped shields. But this piece obviously parodies male choruses—they are Amazons, figures of myth and not documents of reality.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, the male pyrrhic chorus is amply attested in literature, sculpture, and vase painting.

31. Reinsberg, "Der Polyxena-Sarkophag in Çanakkale," in *Sepulkral- und Votivdenkmäler östlicher Mittelmeergebiete* (see note 15), p. 209.

32. The sword dance is another matter (C. Bron "The Sword Dance for Artemis," *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 24 [1996]: 69–83); but that is *not* what is represented here. These dancers wear shield and helmet, as is the norm for a pyrrhic, but not swords.

33. Poursat lists only one vase with more than one female pyrrhicist, with one girl dancing and another observing from the side; it is probably a school scene. Attic red-figure hydria, Copenhagen 7359 (BADN 2634).

- Second, the feminine pyrrhic was ordinarily performed at drinking parties as entertainment for men, not at festivals.<sup>34</sup> Only one Athenian vessel shows a pyrrhic in a sacred setting—the aforementioned pyxis in Naples—and the sex of the dancer is not absolutely clear (either a male in shorts or a prepubescent girl). The girls' pyrrhic chorus for Artemis is a mirage.
- Third, the feminine pyrrhic seems to have made its appearance only in the classical period, peaking around 440–420, or about fifty years after our sarcophagus. As Jean-Claude Poursat put it in his definitive study, "representations of the 'feminine' pyrrhic are absolutely unknown to the Severe style," hence to the archaic style as well.<sup>35</sup> The only possible exception to this rule is the same anomalous black-figure vessel of the Perizoma Group.
- Fourth, the girls' chorus was generally a cyclical or round dance, while the dancers here are in ranks mimicking the hoplite phalanx; it more closely resembles the masculine dance on the Polyterpos flask from Corinth.<sup>36</sup>
- Fifth, long hair might be an index not of sex but of age. The men on the front of the sarcophagus are all either adults or ephebes; the chorus could consist of youths who have not yet shorn their hair at the *koureion* festival, age sixteen. At Athens, one of the age-classes for the pyrrhic chorus was the *ageneioi*, "the beardless youths," that is, boys whom one would expect to have long hair.<sup>37</sup>

In the end, the identification of the dancers as feminine depends upon two things: first, the fact that the musicians are female; second, the interpretation of their garments as shorts, not tunics. Other features seem masculine, notably the choral formation and the festal occasion.

In this situation it might seem precipitous to take a firm stand at all. Must we do so? Even by Greek standards, the sculptor is being opaque, blending iconographic elements in a way that hampers legibility.

To be sure, it would be farfetched to suggest that the sculptor deliberately set out to confuse his viewers. But he seems to have shown a fine disregard for the clear demarcation of sexual difference. Clarity on this point did not matter much in this scene.

But it very much did matter in the Polyxena scene, which could hardly be more emphatic on that score. The sculptor practically begs us to compare the two sides, for the four dancers match up visually with the four young killers on the front of the sarcophagus. It is as though the epic warriors, whose violence is so strongly gendered, had their antithesis in these androgynous dancers, martial yet pacific, on the back. While Reinsberg's determination of gender seems too hasty, in short, she has helped to clarify an important organizing principle of the sarcophagus's iconography; I shall return to this point below.

But back to the question at hand: What is going on in this scene? A clue may lie in the musical accompaniment to the dance: pipes, cithara, and the *krotala* or castanets. Greek music was frequently occasional and different instrumentations accompanied different sorts of song. The combination that appears on the sarcophagus is extremely rare, both in literature and in art. It occurs on only five Athenian vases, none of which much resembles our sarcophagus.<sup>38</sup> The trio does, however, appear in a fragment of Sappho, from the nearby island of Lesbos (fr. 44). Sappho describes the arrival of Andromache as bride to Hector, son of Priam. The lines are fragmentary

38. M. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford, 1992), p. 123 cites only Sappho fr. 44 as an example of the use of castanets with both cithara and pipes (see below). West also argues that *krotala* were not used in ritual. The five Attic vases with the combination of cithara, pipes, and *krotala* in a single scene are: (1) Attic black-figure pyxis, Class of Berlin 3308 (Athens NM 14909; BADN 2660): domestic scene of women. (2) Attic black-figure hydria, Euphiletos Painter (London, British Museum B300; BADN 301725): Dionysiac. (3) Attic black-figure amphora, Leagros Group (Munich, Antikensammlungen 1416; J379; BADN 302085): *komos* of men. (4) Attic red-figure cup by Makron (Baltimore, Hopkins B10; BADN 204733): Dionysiac. (5) Attic red-figure hydria by Polygnotos (Naples, Museo archeologico 81398; BADN 213444): dancing school for girls (including a solo pyrrhicist). Of these five, nos. 1 and 4 are closest to our sarcophagus, in that both show women playing the instruments. The Polygnotan dancing school even includes a solo pyrrhic dancer! But we should not make too much of the similarities. A school scene may be expected to contain a hodgepodge of instruments. Moreover, given what we know of the solo pyrrhic as saucy entertainment for symposia, the Polygnotan dancer seems rather different from the respectable chorus on the sarcophagus. This leaves the Athens pyxis as the closest comparandum. It is hardly an eloquent piece, but it might give some support to the idea that the trio of cithara, aulos, and *krotala* was especially appropriate to a wedding dance.

34. See, for example, Xenophon, *Anabasis* 6.1.4–6.1.13.

35. J.-P. Poursat "Les représentations de danse armée dans la céramique attique," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 92 (1968): 550–615, esp. p. 604. Author's translation.

36. Calame (see note 29). Polyterpos aryballos: Corinth C-54-1 (D. A. Amyx, *Corinthian Vase-Painting of the Archaic Period* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988], pp. 165, 556, 560–561).

37. IG 22 2311; Lysias 21.4. See P. Murray and P. Wilson, *Music and the Muses: The Culture of 'Mousikê' in the Classical Athenian City* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 95–96.

but they begin with a Trojan herald describing Andromache, who comes with “many golden bracelets and [perfumed?] purple robes, ornate trinkets [*poikil' athyrmata*], and countless silver drinking cups and ivory.” At once the city, and in particular “the whole crowd of women and [tender?-] ankled maidens,” turns out in celebration of the bride and groom.

[A]nd the sweet-sounding pipe and cithara were mingled and the sound of castanets and maidens sang clearly a holy song and a marvelous echo reached the sky . . . and everywhere in the streets was . . . bowls and cups . . . myrrh and cassia and frankincense were mingled. The elder women cried out joyfully, and all the men let forth a lovely high-pitched strain calling on Paian, the archer skilled in the lyre, and they sang in praise of the godlike Hector and Andromache.<sup>39</sup>

Sappho describes a scene very like that on the sarcophagus: a bride accompanied by luxury goods, greeted by maids and by a festal procession to the sound of three instruments: pipes, cithara, and castanets. Might this similarity help to identify the scene on the sarcophagus? Instead of a dance for Artemis, perhaps the chorus and musicians belong to the public celebration of the wedding. If so, then this side of the sarcophagus would have a unified composition, like the Polyxena scene on the front; in addition, there would be no need to imagine a cult of Artemis where no Artemis appears.

The trouble is that Sappho does not describe a dance in armor—or any other dance, for that matter. Indeed, it must be said that although dancing often accompanied Greek weddings, there is no literary or iconographic evidence at all for pyrrhic dances specifically at such occasions. On the other hand, there is good evidence for what Steven Lonsdale calls a “blend of the martial and the amorous” in wedding dances, from the knives that the dancing youths wear on the Shield of Achilles in the eighteenth book of the *Iliad*, to a famous Spartan dance called the *hormos*, in which young men displayed fighting moves as part of a courtship of young girls.<sup>40</sup> So a pyrrhic at a wedding could make a certain sense. But one would like a more specific rationale.

Of course, the elephant in the room here is the fact that *any* reading in terms of bridal imagery needs to confront the inconvenient truth that this sarcophagus contained a forty-year-old man. It is this incompatibility that has led so many scholars to maintain that it was really for a girl, archaeological evidence be damned.

39. Sappho fr. 44, trans. D. A. Campbell.

40. S. Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion* (Baltimore, 1993), p. 212.

## Pyrrhos/Pyrrhike

Happily, there just might be a way to resolve both of these issues in a single blow: to justify the idea of a pyrrhic dance at a wedding, and to connect nuptial imagery with the Sacrifice of Polyxena and with a male interment. There is a strong thematic connection between the two sides of the sarcophagus, hitherto overlooked. The young man who plunges his knife into Polyxena’s neck is Neoptolemos, son of Achilles.<sup>41</sup> This young blade was conceived on Skyros before the Trojan War began. At birth he was named Pyrrhos, but when he eventually went to Troy himself his name was changed to Neoptolemos, or “Young Warrior.” Pyrrhos, also known as Neoptolemos, distinguished himself in the final phases of the war, and featured prominently in two lost poems of the epic cycle, the *Little Iliad* and the *Ilioupersis*, or Fall of Troy. In particular, he defeated the last great champion of the Trojan side, a hero from the Kaikos valley named Eurypylos.<sup>42</sup> He was the first Greek to leap from the Trojan horse; he slew King Priam as the latter took refuge on the altar of Zeus; and, of course, he killed Polyxena at his father’s grave.

But Pyrrhos did something else. After killing Eurypylos, he invented a dance in armor that bore his name: the pyrrhic.<sup>43</sup> It is this dance that appears on the back of the sarcophagus. That is: *the man who kills Polyxena on Side A is the inventor of the armed dance on Side B*; indeed, the dance is named after him. This connection is no mere mythographic conceit, for the sculptor emphasizes a connection between the two groups. There are four young men on the front of the sarcophagus: Pyrrhos or Neoptolemos and the three

41. Sources: J. Scherf, “Neoptolemos (1),” in *Brill’s New Pauly*, ed. H. Cancik and H. Schneider. Brill Online, accessed August 2009. <http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl>.

42. Homer, *Odyssey* 11.519–520.

43. On the pyrrhic in general see: Lonsdale (see note 40), pp. 137–168; P. Ceccarelli, *La pirrica nell’antichità greco romana: Studi sulla danza armata* (Pisa and Rome, 1998); R. Harmon, “Pyrrhiche,” in *Brill’s New Pauly* (see note 41). In Attic vase painting see Poursat (see note 35); M.-H. Delavaud-Roux, *Les Danses Armées en Grèce Antique* (Aix-en-Provence, 1993); F. Gilotta, “Gümüşçay e l’Etruria: Due ambienti a confronto,” *Rivista di archeologia* 22 (1998): 11–18; H. A. Shapiro, “Modest Athletes and Liberated Women: Etruscans on Attic Black-figure Vases,” in *Not the Classical Ideal: Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art*, ed. B. Cohen (Leiden, 2000), pp. 315–337, esp. pp. 333–336. In Euripides, Andromache: E. Borthwick, “Trojan Leap and Pyrrhic Dance in Euripides’ Andromache 1129–41,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 87 (1967): 18–23. Connections with tragedy: J. Winkler, “The Ephebes’ Song: Tragoedia and Polis,” in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, ed. J. Winkler and F. Zeitlin (Princeton, 1990), pp. 20–62.

others who hold Polyxena. Everyone else is either female or an old man. Just so, there are four young men on the back of the sarcophagus—the four pyrrhic dancers. As you can see, they occupy approximately the same place on each side. This is not to suggest that they are the same four men, merely that there is a formal analogy between the two, and that this analogy makes sense once we recall that Pyrrhos and the pyrrhic dance go together.<sup>44</sup> In short, the very feature that is anomalous in the bridal scene is also the one that *connects* the two halves of the sarcophagus. The pyrrhic dance is "overdetermined."

We now have a plausible way to connect the two sides of the sarcophagus and, at the same time, to explain the odd but important presence of a pyrrhic dance. The unifying thread to the iconography is not simply women's ritual and girls' transitions. The unifying thread is Pyrrhos—specifically, Pyrrhos as a way to consider at least two distinct types of social relation. On the one hand, there is the relation between young males and their paternal ancestors; on the other, there is the relation between young males and, precisely, the world of women's ritual and girls' transitions. As will become clear, the sarcophagus presents something like a fugal combination of these two themes.

Might we go a step further and suggest that the pyrrhic, and the central importance of Pyrrhos to the sarcophagus's overall design, should actually *identify* the wedding scene? If this sarcophagus is, in a way, all about Pyrrhos, then might it not be *his* bride that we see on the back, his wedding that is celebrated with the dance that bears his name? As it happens, Pyrrhos married none other than Andromache, the widow of Hector—the same Andromache whose first wedding was described by Sappho as being celebrated with the trio of cithara, pipes, and castanets. Andromache was awarded to Pyrrhos as a prize after the fall of Troy—right about the time that he killed Polyxena, in fact. Although Euripides (in *Andromache*) emphasizes her status as a concubine,

44. To be sure, Pyrrhos is not the only person credited with inventing the pyrrhic in ancient literature. Aristotle says it was Achilles himself, and other sources mention Athena or a group of supernatural beings called the Kouretes (sources conveniently assembled in Harmon [see note 43]). Significantly, however, the version featuring Pyrrhos is the only one attested with any certainty before the late fifth or fourth century B.C.E. Arkhilokhos of Paros mentioned it in the seventh century, as did Euripides in the *Andromache* of around 425 (Arkhilokhos fr. 304 West; Euripides, *Andromache* 1135). All the other versions appear significantly later than our sarcophagus. The connection of Pyrrhos and the pyrrhic was unquestionably current at the time that the sarcophagus was carved, and there is no evidence (although it is not impossible) that any other version was then current.

not a wife, the fact is that she bore Pyrrhos three sons, including the ancestor of the royal house of Epirus (this line led to Olympias, mother of Alexander the Great) and also the eponymous hero of the city of Pergamon. That last point could be important, for it suggests that the myth might have had some regional importance in northwest Anatolia.

This is pretty slender evidence, and the best that can be said for this identification is that it ties up all the loose ends. It would be nice if it were true. But it need not be true for the basic point to hold, which is that the unifying thread here is Pyrrhos, that is, the "Young Warrior" Neoptolemos, and his dance—and hence, by extension, the relations of young men variously to fathers and girls.

### Youths and maids

It is important to recognize that Pyrrhos is not a villain in Greek myth. He is a problematic figure, a perpetual adolescent whose excessive sense of obligation to his dead father leads him to misunderstand his obligations to other, living authority figures. His problems play out specifically in the realm of sacrifice. To honor his father, Pyrrhos kills the old king of Troy, Priam, on the altar of Zeus, which is a misguided or excessive sacrifice; he then kills Polyxena on the grave of his father, which is a misguided or excessive libation; he then demands recompense from Apollo for the killing of his father, which is a misguided way of trafficking with the gods; and just when he finally gets it right, and goes to Delphi to apologize to Apollo by finally making a good, healthy sacrifice, he gets killed by the Delphians. Part of the tragedy of Neoptolemos is that he is a good kid who gets mixed up in bad situations (this is, essentially, the plot of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*). When it comes to Polyxena, Euripides flags his confusion explicitly, stating that as he plunged in the blade the youth was both "unwilling and willing," *ou thelōn te kai thelōn*, out of pity for the girl, *oiktōi korēs*.<sup>45</sup> Ovid is more straightforward: Neoptolemos wept and was "unwilling" (*invitus*) as he did the deed.<sup>46</sup> In this regard he comes off rather better than Achilles himself, the "best of the Achaeans," who unflinchingly butchered Trojan youths at the tomb of Patroklos (Il. 23.175–78).

The sculptor is alive to this ambivalence. It is at work in the barely contained eroticism of the sacrificial scene, its overtones of sexual violence (fig. 11). Pyrrhos

45. Euripides, *Hekabe* 566

46. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.475–476: *ipse etiam flens invitusque sacerdos praebita coniecto rupit praecordia ferro.*



Figure 11. Sarcophagus from Gümüşçay: Detail of Pyrrhos and Polyxena. Photo: courtesy University of Tübingen.

violates the girl; his elbow breaches the upper frame of the panel, the only element in the whole composition to do so, as if to express the transgression. A thematic of rape would be paramount in Euripides' telling of the tale some sixty years later. After the killing, Hekabe cleans her daughter's corpse. Alluding to the lustral bath that would have preceded the girl's wedding, she calls Polyxena "a bride that is no bride, a virgin virgin no more."<sup>47</sup> Her killing was a sort of marriage; Polyxena died nobly, in manly fashion, "robbed," as she herself puts it, "of the bridegroom and wedding I should have had."<sup>48</sup> The sculptor seems to have had something similar in mind. The locked gazes of Polyxena and Pyrrhos allude to another, more common iconographic type: the battle of Achilles, Pyrrhos's father, against the Amazon queen Penthesilea. According to tradition, Achilles was smitten with love for Penthesilea as their eyes met at the very moment he plunged his blade into her breast.

47. Euripides, *Hekabe* 612.

48. Euripides, *Hekabe* 416 (trans. D. Kovacs). Later tradition held that Polyxena became Achilles' bride in the underworld, but that story seems to have been unknown in the fifth century. See Loraux (see note 12).

From the mid-sixth century onward this motif figured in Athenian vase painting: Killer and victim lock gazes, and penetration by the blade becomes explicitly erotic.<sup>49</sup> The sculptor of the Polyxena sarcophagus has simply adapted this motif. Like Euripides, he uses this erotic connection to color relations between Pyrrhos and Polyxena, and to make the sacrifice a kind of sexual violation. It is a masterstroke of dramatic characterization. Visually, Pyrrhos is miming the actions of his father as he simultaneously commits a crime and performs his filial duty; by stabbing his blade into Polyxena's neck, he gives the girl, "a bride no bride, a virgin virgin no more," to his father.

So Achilles haunts this scene, just as his tomb looms over the background and, by rounding the corner, binds together the mourning Hekabe and the dying Polyxena. Here it is useful to recall the basic affinity between Achilles and the man whose remains lay inside the sarcophagus. As noted earlier, the depicted tumulus on

49. For example on an Attic black-figure amphora by Exekias. London, British Museum B210 (BADN 310389): Achilles and Penthesilea, ca. 550.

the sarcophagus figures the real tumulus in which the sarcophagus lies. The result is an array of references and self-references that is easier to take in with the eyes than to describe in words.

Taken as a whole, the monument—dead body plus sarcophagus plus tumulus—produces a sequence of signs or *sēmata*, markers of something absent and invisible. Each step in this sequence has a spatial correlate, a movement *inward*. The real tumulus at Gümüşçay is the sign of the dead man; it signifies something *inside*, something invisible and interior.<sup>50</sup> That thing turns out to be the sarcophagus—which, as a hollow container, can reiterate this structure of signification and concealment. Carved on the stone container is another tumulus, a virtual counterpart to the real one. Concealed inside that virtual tumulus are the ashes of Achilles. The depicted narrative shows the power of such container-signs. For, though Achilles remains invisible, he is efficacious nonetheless: He impels the actions and even the poses of the mortals who remain behind. The tale of Polyxena's death is a tale of the power of a dead man—and of his tomb, a "*sēma* beside the broad Hellespont"—to sway the living. Insofar as there is an analogy between the depicted tomb of Achilles and the real tomb at Gümüşçay, we may say that the scene on the sarcophagus is an allegory of the monument's commemorative function.

### *Sōma/Sēma*

But this formalistic description seems to miss the central dilemma of this monument. What is the relationship between the horrific violence on the front and the idyllic scene on the back? How can we reconcile either one with the dead male body inside the marble box? To use one of the hoariest of all Greek puns: How does the *sōma* relate to the *sēma*, the body to the sign?

We have seen that the tomb of Achilles is a paradigm of the efficacious sign, in that it conceals absolutely and yet establishes the present power of the absent referent, the dead hero who impels the action. The mound itself is unrevealing, and deliberately so. Smooth, inviolate, crowned with a phallic marker, it signifies its contents unambiguously: Achilles, best of the Achaeans. This sign works; the evidence is there to see, in the fate of the murdered virgin.

To this cryptic and impenetrable mound, marker of the dead male body, we may contrast the expressive and

violated body of the girl. Not only is Polyxena penetrated in the most gruesome and vivid manner possible, but the women nearby are extravagantly expressive—not only through gesture but also in the rendering of their garments. By the canons of archaic art these mantles are exceptionally revealing; the women's breasts are exposed in some cases, which in *iconographic* terms is more at home in erotica than in epic imagery (compare Hebe in figure 10). Formally we are invited to contrast the draped female body to the markers of the dead by the "rhyme," so to speak, between the kneeling mourner at left and the tripod at right: Bookending the scene, each comprises a stark, upright rectangle with a circle on top. A sign that functions by concealment and difference (the tomb) contrasts with permeable bodies and garments that hide nothing (the women). Even when it is not literally revealing of the body, a woman's garment can be revealing of character or *ēthos*: Thus Hekabe is perhaps even more piteous than the young mourners opposite, her heavy veiling suggesting an inward turn out of grief; instead of throwing out her arms, she clutches her brow.<sup>51</sup> Pyrrhos aside, the men are mere ciphers—although Nestor, in his long mantle, does squeeze shut his nostrils with thumb and forefinger.

In this way, the front of the sarcophagus articulates the feminine body as open, revealed, and penetrable variously by knives or gazes. It makes an antithesis to the masculine—indeed literally phallic—grave-sign, which is closed, inviolate, and powerful.<sup>52</sup> The vulnerability of the body—to terror, swords, sorrow, death—is by no means minimized, but it is displaced onto the feminine. "And glory always makes the blood of women flow," as Nicole Loraux put it.<sup>53</sup>

These stark alternatives do not pertain to the other half of the sarcophagus, which, as we have seen, tends to *obscure* differences of gender. The bridegroom is absent, much like Achilles on the front, but there is no sign to mark him and to retain his presence in the here and now. The closest thing to a masculine actor is the troupe of pyrrhic dancers. But, as we have seen, those four are curiously androgynous, even as they match up with the four girl-killers on the front. While many of the women on the front of the sarcophagus wear unusually

51. See Neer (see note 50), pp. 105–181.

52. On the femininity of containers in Greek iconography see F. Lissarrague, "Women, Boxes, Containers: Some Signs and Metaphors," in *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*, ed. E. Reeder (Princeton, 1995), pp. 91–101, and E. Reeder, "Women as Containers," *ibid.*, pp. 195–199.

53. Loraux (see note 12), p. 48.

50. On interiority in Greek sculpture see R. Neer, *The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture* (Chicago, 2010), chs. 2–3.

revealing costumes, the dancers' armor has the opposite effect: It obscures their gender. For Aristophanes, the fact that pyrrhic dancers' shields could hide their sex was an occasion for bawdy jokes; here, it is a way to figure something like semiotic obscurity.<sup>54</sup> The shields, smooth discs, quintessentially masculine, hide and conceal, and in this regard are analogous to the tumulus on the front. In this case, however, it is unclear what these signs of masculinity actually mean. Between the nameless, unmarked bridegroom and the indeterminate gender of the dancers, this scene is almost devoid of sexual difference—a world of signs without referents, of brides without grooms, of armor that, instead of signifying manliness, conceals a permanently inscrutable body.

So while these narratives ring in changes on relations of gender and filiation, they also ring in changes on a formal system of signs. The paradigm consists of a sequence of signs, each of which at once completely conceals, and perfectly signifies, a determinate entity, as a tomb or a sarcophagus both conceals and marks a dead body. "And some day one of the men to come will say, as he sees it, one who in his benched ships sails over the wine-dark sea: 'This is the sign of a man who died long ago in battle . . .'" One antitype to this paradigm is revelation, as an open garment reveals a body, or a pose reveals an inner state or *ēthos*; the sarcophagus genders this openness as feminine and figures revelation as something akin to penetration or murder or rape. Another antitype to the paradigm is a sign that is as cryptic as a tumulus—a sign that requires decoding—but turns out to reveal nothing determinate at all. We know what is in the tomb of Achilles, but we don't know what is behind those shields; Achilles motivates the action on the front and is visible in his signs, but the corresponding term on the back, the bridegroom, is absent and unmarked. If one antitype is total legibility, the body made all too present, the other is total inscrutability, the body absent.

The sarcophagus form is crucial to all this—a form understood, here, as a container that conceals the dead body and yet bodies it forth, makes it unmistakably present, in and through a system of signs. Indeed, this entire system, both narrative and formal, may be said to assert the essential meaningfulness of the sepulchral container, to connect the exterior surface to the literally cryptic interior. The irony, of course, is that in epic Achilles was not buried in a sarcophagus: He was cremated, his ashes mingled in an urn with those of his

friend Patroklos. But the actual disposal of the corpse, the real corruption of the flesh, is of secondary importance in this system, which labors mightily to present the masculine body as permanent and impenetrable, like a mound, like a shield, like a box of white stone.<sup>55</sup>

### Tumuli and territory in Hellespontine Phrygia

We have seen the sarcophagus as a formal system of signs, and as a way to think about the meaningfulness and integrity of the masculine—the *dead* masculine—body. But how does it fit into a broader pattern of use? What was at stake in such imagery in Hellespontine Phrygia around 500 B.C.E.?

Stone sarcophagi were in widespread use in the Greek communities of western Anatolia and the nearby islands.<sup>56</sup> Examples are known from Miletos, Ephesos, and Chios, and especially Samos, which has yielded a whopping 128 specimens including several with architectural ornamentation.<sup>57</sup> Terracotta sarcophagi were not uncommon, notably on Lesbos and at Clazomenae.<sup>58</sup> In Lydia and greater Phrygia, by contrast, they seem to have been less popular, although not wholly unknown. At Sardis in Lydia a fifth-century tomb with strong Persian features contained a sarcophagus of similar type.<sup>59</sup>

55. For an earlier example of a theme from the Ilioupersis adorning, and reflecting upon, a container for a dead body, see S. Ebbinghaus, "Protector of the City, or the Art of Storage in Early Greece," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 125 (2005): 51–72.

56. See D. Kurtz and J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (London, 1971), pp. 267–272; Hitzl (see note 5) (with A. Johnston, Review of Hitzl, *Classical Review* 44 [1994]: 380–381), which perhaps understates the prevalence of sarcophagi in western Anatolia.

57. H. Philipp, "Archaische Gräber in Ostionien," *Istanbulur Mitteilungen* 31 (1982): 149–166, esp. p. 154. For additional examples from Miletos see W. Müller-Weiner et al., "Milet 1987. Vorbericht über die Arbeiten des Jahres 1987," *Istanbulur Mitteilungen* 38 (1988): 251–290, esp. pp. 261–266.

58. Philipp (see note 57), pp. 154–155. On Lesbian graves see N. Spencer, "Early Lesbos between East and West: A 'Grey Area' of Aegean Archaeology," *Annual of the British School at Athens* 90 (1995): 269–306; N. Spencer, "Respecting Your Elders and Betters: Ancestor Worship at Antissa, Lesbos," *Echos du monde classique* 14 (1995): 45–60. On Clazomenae see the recent overview in B. Hümmüzlü, "Burial Grounds at Klazomenai: Geometric through Hellenistic Periods," in *Klazomenai, Teos and Abdera: Metropolis and Colony*, ed. A. Moustaka et al. (Thessaloniki, 2004), pp. 77–96.

59. Sardis: E. Duisinberre, "Imperial Style and Constructed Identity: A 'Graeco-Persian' Cylinder Seal from Sardis," *Ars Orientalis* 27 (1997): 99–129. Duisinberre cites a fourth-century tomb from Susa, containing a bronze tub-sarcophagus, as a possible analogy: F. Tallon, "The Achaemenid Tomb on the Acropole," in *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures in the Louvre*, ed. P. O. Harper, J. Aruz, and F. Tallon (New York, 1992), pp. 242–252.

54. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 988–999.

Also from Lydia is a local type of bathtub sarcophagus sunk directly into the ground, a sort of prefabricated cist; although the shape is idiosyncratic, the direct burial recalls Clazomenaeen sarcophagi.<sup>60</sup> But far more characteristic of Achaemenid Anatolia is a stone chamber with painted stone couches or *klinai*.<sup>61</sup> Such tombs have been found throughout Lydia and Lycia and in the Granikos region as well, notably an early classical example at Dedetepe.<sup>62</sup> While it would probably be going too far to call the sarcophagus a specifically Hellenizing sepulchral form, still the Polyxena grave certainly has more in common with eastern Greek burials than with Anatolian ones.

What *is* remarkable, however, is the fact that the sarcophagus is carved with figural scenes at all. Here the search for contemporary analogs takes one far afield, to Etruria or Cyprus.<sup>63</sup> Direct influence is another matter. Of course the eastern Mediterranean was crisscrossed by trade networks and one can always find evidence of contact if the need arises. But given that the Greeks of Anatolia were routinely using sarcophagi, variously of terracotta and of stone, Occam's razor might come into effect. We know that the Greeks had a tradition of wooden boxes decorated with figural scenes, like the famous Chest of Cypselus at Olympia, and we also know that the Greeks had a tradition of using decorated containers to house the dead, like the famous Mykonos pithos.<sup>64</sup> Those traditions, combined with local mortuary customs, might suffice to explain this otherwise unique example of a carved sarcophagus.<sup>65</sup> But the matter is not closed, and probably never will be. An early fifth-century funerary monument at the satrapal capital of Daskyleion has magi leading horses carved round the exterior;

figured monuments of this type might also have provided inspiration.<sup>66</sup> If the bridal scene might translate a Persian motif into the Greek idiom, the idea of carving figural scenes onto the exterior of the sarcophagus might have a similar origin.

To explore further the matter of cultural contact, it is worthwhile looking more closely at the political situation of the Hellespontine region around 500 B.C.E. The south coast of the Sea of Marmara was dotted with small Greek city-states, many of which were Milesian foundations. In fact, the sarcophagus's findspot lies just 1.7 kilometers from the Greek city of Didymon Teikhos, or "Double Wall."<sup>67</sup> It is likely that the Polyxena Sarcophagus was made for a wealthy citizen of this *polis*. The entire region, however, had come under the sway of Persia in 546 B.C.E.; the satrap or governor ruled from Daskyleion, a Phrygian town some distance to the east. But we know very little about the workings of Persian rule in this early period. We do not know, for instance, the extent of Persian settlement or land tenure; while Persian nobility could rule large estates in Anatolia during the fourth century, it is by no means clear that any such system held in the sixth or early fifth.<sup>68</sup> Herodotus gives the impression that Persian rule over the Hellespontine cities was indirect, via tyrants whom the Persians put in place.<sup>69</sup> The whole region revolted from Persia in 499, only to be reconquered by 494—Phoenician ships burned and pillaged their way through the Hellespont—and then liberated after the Persian defeat in 479. Didymon Teikhos, specifically, was a member of the Delian League and paid an annual tribute to Athens of one thousand drachmae.

60. Roosevelt (see note 8), pp. 137–138.

61. E. Duisinberre, *Aspects of Empire in Achaemenid Sardis* (Cambridge, U.K., 2003), pp. 128–157. Arguing for a possible pre-Achaemenid date: E. Baughan, "Anatolian Funerary Klinai: Identity and Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2004); Roosevelt (see note 8), pp. 177–178 and n. 91.

62. Dedetepe: N. Sevinç et al., "The Dedetepe Tumulus," *Studia Troica* 8 (1998): 305–327.

63. For example Gilotta (see note 43) and Massa-Pairault (see note 18).

64. Ebbinghaus (see note 55).

65. On Greek chests see E. Brümmer, "Griechische Truhenbehälter," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 100 (1985): 1–168. On the Cypselus chest in particular see R. Splitter, *Die "Kypseloslade" in Olympia: Form, Funktion und Bildschmuck: eine archäologische Rekonstruktion* (Mainz, 2000); A. Snodgrass, "Pausanias and the Chest of Kypselos," in *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Roman Greece*, ed. S. Alcock, J. Cherry, and J. Elsner (Oxford, 2001), pp. 127–153.

66. S. Karagöz, "Neue Ansichten zu einem freistehenden Grabbau aus Daskyleion," in Delemen et al. (see note 1), pp. 197–205.

67. Rose et al. (see note 1), p. 78. On Didymon Teikhos see M. Hansen and T. Nielsen, *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford, 2004), p. 979, no. 741.

68. Pace N. Sekunda, "Persian Settlement in Hellespontine Phrygia," in *Achaemenid Studies III. Method and Theory*, ed. A. Kuhrt and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (Leiden, 1988), pp. 175–196; and N. Sekunda, "Achaemenid Settlement in Caria, Lycia and Greater Phrygia," in *Achaemenid Studies VI. Asia Minor and Egypt: Old Cultures in a New Regime*, ed. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt (Leiden, 1991), pp. 83–143, which amply document the situation in the fourth century but rely heavily on extrapolations from a single anecdote in Plutarch's *Life of Kimon* for the early fifth century. F. Maffre, "Example of the Persian Occupation in the Satrapy of Phrygia through the Study of the Population from the Asian Provinces in the Achaemenid Empire," in Delemen et al. (see note 1), pp. 225–246, likewise concentrates on the later classical period.

69. Herodotus 4.138, naming Abydos, Lampskos, Parion, and Kyzikos.



Beyond Greeks and Persians there was a third ethnic group in this vicinity. The Polyxena tumulus lay well up the Granikos valley, at the point where the coastal plain starts to give way to the hilly interior. This latter territory was inhabited by a non-Greek population, the Teukrians of Gergis.<sup>70</sup> Herodotus identifies these Teukrians as the last remnants of the ancient Trojans; their name refers to Teukros, legendary founder of Troy. They were based on the north side of the Skamander valley, and they may well have controlled the whole of this massif, including some important gold mines.<sup>71</sup> At any rate, Herodotus describes Xerxes marching past several Greek cities in the Hellespont while keeping “the territory of the Teukrians of Gergis” continuously on his opposite side; the Teukrian territory corresponded in size to that of multiple city-states. In the late fifth century Gergis was controlled by a pro-Persian dynast, Zenis the Dardanian (or “of Dardanos”), a name that asserts a clear connection to ancient Troy, the Dardanian land.<sup>72</sup> In Athens, meanwhile, it was common to identify the Trojans as “the Phrygians,” as when Euripides has Polyxena refer to her father as *anax Phrygōn*, “Lord of the Phrygians.”<sup>73</sup> “Phrygia” and “Phrygian” can be somewhat vague terms, but could certainly apply to the Granikos region. In short, our sarcophagus, with its bloodthirsty image of a Greek killing a Trojan, was found in the general vicinity of the border between Greek and what was understood to be “sub-Trojan” territory.

Epic could play an important role in disputes about territory in this region. Herodotus (5.94) tells of a war between Athens and Mytilene, sometime in the sixth century, over control of the entrance to the Hellespont. Each side based its claim to land in the Hellespontine region on the authority of Homer. After the Athenians

had seized Sigeion, at the mouth of the Hellespont, from the people of Mytilene, on Lesbos:

The Mytilenians, demanding the return of their land, made incursions from the citadel of Akhilleion and waged a long war against the Athenians of Sigeion. But the Athenians refused to acknowledge their claim, arguing that a share in the land of Ilion belonged no more to the Aiolians than to themselves or any other Hellenes who had joined Menelaos in avenging the abduction of Helen.<sup>74</sup>

So epic was a way to articulate and justify territorial claims: Because the Athenians had fought in the Trojan War, Athens had a right to Sigeion. Brian Rose has recently argued that such rhetoric became especially important around 500, as tensions rose between the Greeks and their Persian masters.<sup>75</sup>

Note that Herodotus mentions *Akhilleion* as the location of the Lesbian base. Located on the Aegean coast at modern Sivritepe, Akhilleion was actually the site of the grave of Achilles; this is the source of its name.<sup>76</sup> As such, it received visits from Xerxes on the eve of his invasion of Greece, and Alexander the Great on the eve of his invasion of Persia—not to mention Mehmet Fatih before the conquest of Constantinople.<sup>77</sup> This site is, of course, the very one depicted on our sarcophagus. When you live in the Hellespontine region, the Tomb of Achilles is not some abstract locale that you hear about in a poem; it is a real place, a place you can visit, a place not sixty miles as the crow flies from Didymon Teikhos. The sarcophagus establishes a connection, not just with the abstract concept of a heroic tomb visible from the sea, “a great and blameless mound,” but with a local, and symbolically important, territorial marker.

Tumuli were a common means for Greek elites to assert regional authority, as a number of scholars have argued.<sup>78</sup> Something of the sort might be afoot in this

70. Herodotus 7.43 (see also 5.122; Athenaeus 6.256 c) suggests a fairly large expanse of territory under Gergithian control, all in the hinterland: “When the (Persian) army had come to the river Skamander, which was the first river after the beginning of their march from Sardis that fell short of their needs and was not sufficient for the army and the cattle to drink—arriving at this river, Xerxes ascended to the citadel of Priam, having a desire to see it. After he saw it and asked about everything there, he sacrificed a thousand cattle to Athena of Ilion, and the Magi offered libations to the heroes. . . . When it was day they journeyed on from there, keeping on their left the cities of Rhoition and Ophryneion and Dardanos, which borders Abydos, and on their right the Teukrian Gergithians.” On Gergis see J. M. Cook, *The Troad* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 349–351; G. Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Europe, the Islands, and Asia Minor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995), pp. 165–166; Hansen and Nielsen (see note 67), p. 1008, no. 777.

71. See Cook (see note 70), pp. 345–351.

72. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 3.1.15–22.

73. Euripides, *Hekabe* 349–350.

74. Herodotus 5.94, trans. A. Purvis.

75. C. B. Rose, “Separating Fact from Fiction in the Aiolian Migration,” *Hesperia* 77 (2008): 399–430, esp. pp. 415–419.

76. On the Achilleion see J. Burgess, *The Death and Afterlife of Achilles* (Baltimore, 2009), pp. 111–131; Rose (see note 75), p. 418 and n. 113.

77. Xerxes: Herodotus 7.43. Alexander: Arrian, *Anabasis* 1.2.12. Mehmet: C. Vermeule, “Neon Ilion and Ilium Novum: Kings, Soldiers, Citizens and Tourists at Classical Troy,” in *The Ages of Homer*, ed. S. Morris and J. Carter (Austin, 1995), pp. 467–482, esp. 477–478.

78. J. Whitley, “The Monuments That Stood before Marathon: Tomb Cult and Hero Cult in Archaic Attica,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 98 (1994): 213–230; C. Antonaccio, *An Archaeology of Ancestors: Tomb Cult and Hero Cult in Early Greece* (Lanham, MD, 1995); F. de Polignac, *Cults, Territory, and the Origins of the Greek City-State*, trans. J. Lloyd (Chicago, 1995), pp. 148–153.

case. If it was possible for the Greeks to identify the indigenous people of Ilion and Phrygia with the ancient Trojans, and if the Tomb of Achilles was of symbolic importance in the assertion of Greek land claims in the region, then it is at least possible that the imagery on this sarcophagus might work to similar effect. As much as it is about gender and the articulation of a series of signs, its iconography might be about the establishment of a territorial claim in the Hellespont. Put differently, the complex relations of a young warrior, Neoptolemos, to women and to paternity might be taken as *a way to think about* the question of territorial control, conquest, and cohabitation, everything that the poet Mimneros (fr. 9) called the "overwhelming violence" (*biē hyperoplos*) of Greek settlement in Asia.

The tumulus, however, is only half the story. Over against its epic overtones and symbolic significance is the marriage scene on the reverse. The juxtaposition of war and marriage recalls the good and bad cities on the shield of Achilles (*Iliad* 18.490–540). More precisely, the choral dance suggests a public space, like the "cleverly-wrought dancing-place" where the armed youths dance at *Iliad* 18.591. The dance itself takes a quintessentially public, even civic form. Standing in serried ranks, the pyrrhicists mimic a hoplite phalanx.<sup>79</sup> This infantry formation provided perhaps the single most important term for thinking about civic participation in early Greece: The citizen body was like a phalanx. As the poet Theognis put it, "It is a common benefit to the *polis* and to all the commons, when a man with a firm stance holds his ground among the front ranks."<sup>80</sup>

Taken together, the two scenes both stage and contain the "overwhelming violence" of Greek life in the Hellespont in a turbulent period. The sarcophagus juxtaposes brutality toward non-Greek aboriginals with scenes of marriage (perhaps even to the local princess Andromache, though I do not press the point); the young warrior as girl-killer with the young warrior as feminized dancer; and the territorial marker by the Hellespont with a generic public festival space. It thereby asserts, justifies, and perpetuates the claims of the Greeks of Didymon Teichos to own and occupy this

land.<sup>81</sup> At the same time, the "young warrior" type—Pyrrhos on the front, pyrrhicists on the back—evolves from a *morally* ambiguous slayer of maidens at the family tomb into a *sexually* ambiguous participant in a communal dance. Difference disappears, such that extravagant honors at a family tomb are, in the end, reconcilable with civic harmony, hero cult with hoplite phalanx. The short ends set the stakes by showing the alternatives: the wretchedness of a mother in mourning, against the very picture of domestic tranquility.<sup>82</sup> The sarcophagus is like a diagram of antithesis and synthesis, differentiation and reintegration, variously of the Greeks in Asia, and of aristocratic males in the city. It is all very artfully done. Whether it is "both great and blameless" is another matter.

82. Mourning mothers: N. Loraux, *Les mères en deuil* (Paris, 1990).

79. On the hoplite phalanx in late archaic sculpture see R. Neer, "Framing the Gift: The Politics of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi," *Classical Antiquity* 20 (2001): 273–336, esp. 303–304, with further references.

80. Theognis 1005–1006, trans. D. E. Gerber (modified).

81. Compare the passage from murder to purification in Greek colonial narratives: C. Dougherty, *The Poetics of Colonization: From City to Text in Archaic Greece* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 31–44.