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HUMOUR IN GREEK VASE-PAINTING

par Alexandre G. Mitchell

According to Semos of Delos, cited by Athenaeus, a Parmeniskos of Metapontum stood laughing at the sight of an old wooden cult statue (xoanon) of the goddess Leto in the island of Delos¹. Centuries had passed since it had been first sculpted and, although it was still revered in the time of Parmeniskos, it must have been shapeless². Parmeniskos laughed because in his eyes the statue was grotesque. Ignorance of another culture can be the starting point of laugh-


ter. In this investigation of humour in vase-painting there is a genuine risk of over-interpreting objects. Over two thousand years have passed since the vases were made; Greek culture has faded with time, and we possess only its vestiges.

However real, this difficulty is not insurmountable. Whereas there are a few publications on individual comic pictures, there is no comprehensive study on humour (to geloion) in Greek art. The general impression conveyed by these articles is that these pictures are peripheral representations, seldom found in vase-painting. It is not my intention to attempt to write my own theory of Greek humour, but rather to discuss how Greek vases can be used to understand some mechanisms of humour. Theories on humour are too distant from the object of their study. There are numerous ancient and modern theories on the laughable but they are, to a large extent, lifeless. They are not the material of laughter, but abstract discourses on the laughable. Some have tried to keep humour in the boundaries of a general theory of the incongruous, others within the limitations of a theory of superiority. Humour is too subversive and volatile to be bound into a general theory. There are, unfortunately, in this study more obstacles than ignorance or the temptation of theory. Within an idealistic world-view in which the "Greek" universe, kosmos, was conceived as beauty, in which art was beauty, shaped with order and harmony, there would seem to be little room for comedy, in so far as dignity and idealism are incompatible with humour. This conception of archaic and classical Greek art has often been overstated by scholars and pervades many scholars' views of the subject. This may be the reason why humour has seldom been recognised or investigated in Greek art. The study of Aristophanes, Old Comedy in general and many other comic passages in texts unrelated to Comedy, have taught us not only what the Greeks laughed at, but the very mechanisms of humour in Athens of the time: strangely enough, although we do not laugh at precisely the same things as Athenians did in the 5th century B.C., because we do not share the same culture, taboos and references, the mechanisms through which humour is conveyed, remain the same. There is a great variety of comical mechanisms in literature.

Based on a thorough comparative study between thousands of vase-paintings to discover which were the stock-themes and which images differed from these, at least four comic mechanisms seem applicable: visual puns, situation comedy, caricature and parody. Each of these mechanisms subverts and reveals the stylistic conventions as well as the stock-themes of mythology and daily life in Greek vase-painting. Through these mechanisms, most of the cultural values, social and otherwise, of Athens could be turned upside-down.

3. I use the word "humour" in its modern accepted meaning, as a comprehensive word, for all that is ludicrous or amusing. The mechanisms of humour in representations were studied at length in my doctoral dissertation, Comic pictures in Greek vase-painting, Humour in the Polis and the Dionysian World, in the Sixth and the Fifth Centuries B.C. (Oxford, D. Phil. Trinity Term 2002). I would like to thank Prof. J. Boardman for having read this paper and offered many suggestions for its improvement.


1. VISUAL PUNS

A pun is a word used in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound but with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect, a play on words. Some pictures are “visual” puns because their maker played, in the same benign and reductive way as the conceiver of a play on words, on the surprising combination of different images and meanings to provoke laughter. Aristotle writes in *Rhetorics* that (humour) “arises when it is unexpected”⁶. If pictures on Greek vases repeatedly present certain scenes which were depicted in the same manner, surprise and possibly humour could be created by a painter simply by changing some expected elements in his depictions, or by adding some incongruous ingredients. S. Freud⁷ explains that it is the absurd juxtaposition of incongruous elements which arouses laughter, because the mind cannot choose one explanation in preference to another, and this perplexity ends in laughter. In the case of visual puns, there is often no explanation for an incongruous element except the whim of the painter. Sometimes, figures depicted in a scene interact with the decorative parts of the vase. In other cases, the vase itself appears to come to life.

On a red-figure cup in Berlin (fig. 1)⁸, five satyrs revel in sexual acrobatics. On both sides of the scene, two sphinxes are facing the handles. One of their paws is raised as is usual for decorative sphinxes. The fifth satyr, on the right, turns his back on his companions. Grabbing his erect penis in his right hand, he is about to assault the sphinx on the right, as if it was a living creature playing a part in the scene⁹. But the viewer knows, from other pictures, that this is impossible. Unlike scenes involving Œdipus or the old Thebans in which a sphinx is set inside the frame, the sphinxes on the cup in Berlin are used to frame the scene and cannot take part in its narrative. A red-figure cup in London¹⁰ (fig. 2) displays the same decorative sphinxes, framing a scene in which a man stands between two horses. The painter could have substituted two columns or palmettes for the sphinxes without affecting the narrative of the scene. Satyrs are lustful creatures. What makes this situation comical is the exaggeration of the satyr’s randiness. He is so excited that he takes a statuesque decorative figure for a living “female” creature, standing passively in the scene, whom he could rape. What is more, whereas satyrs often try to rape male or female figures indiscriminately, this is the only depiction in which a sphinx is in danger of being assaulted by Dionysos’ bestial follower. The humour is based on the painter’s playful transformation of the conceptual limits which exist between what is fra-

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⁸. ARV, 2, 1700 (Copyright Museum, Jutta Tietz-Glagow).
⁹. See also Attic black-figure kantharos, Thebes, Arch. Mus., 6051, *ABF*, 30. 8; CVA, Greece, 6, Thebes, *Archaeological Museum, 1, pl. 3. 1.
¹⁰. ARP, 88. 1, 1625 (Copyright courtesy of the British Museum). For an earlier use of the sphinx as a decorative corner-figure, see a Tyrrhenian neck-amphora in Paris, Louvre, E862, *ABF*, 102. 94.

med and what frames the scene. Satyrs are shown over and over again playing comically with different levels of understanding.

Cups decorated with large “masculine” (i.e. with a tear duct) eyes were produced between 550 and 500 B.C. The eye-motif is often interpreted as apotropaic. Although there is an old tradition of painting eyes on vases, cups and a number of vase shapes decorated with large “masculine” eyes cease to be produced at the turn of the fifth century. Had they lost their “magical power” or did buyers suddenly not feel the need to be protected anymore? The so-called “Eye-cups” had simply lost the power to please the viewer. A great number of cups with eyes painted on the exterior have a gorgoneion painted in their tondo, probably because it fitted well in a round composition and not because of the gorgoneion’s alleged apotropaic function. Any connection between the gorgoneion and the large eyes remains purely speculative. The large eyes have been considered to be gorgoneion’s eyes. The large eyes with very few exceptions are “masculine”. The gorgoneion’s eyes in the tondo of the same cups are “female”, i.e. almond-shaped. From their respective shapes, the gorgoneion and the eyes painted on the exterior of the cups have distinctive characteristics; large eyes are not gorgoneion eyes. And, according to J. Boardman, “frightening faces, like the gorgoneion... must have become such a cliché in Greek art and decoration that it no longer terrified”. M. Eisman writes that for vase-painting “in general large eyes were only a decorative fad and no particular symbolic interpretation is warranted” and J. Boehlau: “Only one eye is needed for this purpose”. The large eyes are a pars pro toto of a face. Painters also added noses, ears or corner-palmettes instead and eye-brows to the large eyes to transform the vase into a face. This anthropomorphism brought the vase to life. A Chalcidising cup in Munich (fig. 3) shows large eyes topped by brows with a nose in between, and ears bearing earrings on each side. The large eyes were neither comical nor unexpected. However, when painters make fun of the eyes or the faces through additional visual puns, the representations become truly comical. Two large staring eyes with eyebrows and flanked by two large palmettes are displayed on each side of a red-figure cup in Munich. On one side, a nose is set between the eyes but, on the other, an aulos-case is hanging between. Because the viewer expected to see a pair of eyes with a nose, the artist painted an aulos-case which looks like a nose, because of its vertical position between two eyes and its narrow shape. Although aulos-cases are often found hanging in the background of pictures, its presence here is unexpected and amusing. Similarly, on a Chalcidian cup in Copenhagen (fig. 4), a dog is shown in full-face between two large eyes. D. Mar-

16. J. Boehlau, Die Ionische Augenschalen, AM, 25, 1900, p. 76: “ein Auge genügt für diesen Zweck”.
18. After A. Rumpf, Chalkidische Vasen, Berlin, 1927, pl. 179, cat. 244.
19. Antikensammlungen, 2581, ARV, 31. 55; K. Vierneisel [see n. 11], p. 409, fig. 79–5 a–b.
20. After A. Rumpf, Chalkidische Vasen, p. 37, cat. 260, pl. 166.
tens describes it as a calembour visuel, i.e., a visual pun. The dog is made to look like a nose: it is sitting upright with its front legs straight and it is looking upwards. The general shape of the dog resembles a thick black vertical line, but, because it is crouching, the rear legs are pointing outwards, recalling the nostrils of noses painted between eyes. But it is not a nose, and there is the essence of a visual pun: it is a harmless game the painter plays with well-known images.

The comical nature of this image resides in the impossibility of choosing one way or the other to look at the picture. There is no solution: the dog is a nose, and the nose is wagging its tail.

On a black-figure olpe in Berkeley (fig. 5), Dionysos walks to the right, between two eyes...
supported by satyrs. Both satyrs carry the eyes exactly like other satyrs usually carry wineskins on their backs: they hold the wineskins from one of the tied openings (on this vase the eye’s tear duct). The painter manages an exquisite visual pun, because “a wineskin full to bursting”24 and an eye are very similar in shape. He has traded the decorative function and meaning of the eyes for two wineskins. Only satyrs, because of their deep-seated gluttony for wine, could perform such a comical transformation. The eyes cannot be simultaneously the frame and the content of a scene. When looking at a visual pun, the viewer is disorientated because it is impossible to choose an exclusive way to see the picture25.

As with satyrs who in many scenes use their erect penis as an "aulos-case hanger"26, a red-figure pelike in Berlin (fig. 6)27, attributed to the Pan Painter, shows a very unusual herm with an extended phallos, which is longer than half the length of its whole body and a large

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25. The large eye motif is corrupted in many ways by painters: it becomes the body of sirens as for example on a neck-amphora in London B. M., B225, *ARV* 2, 286.1; *LMC*, VII, pl. 9, c.s. "Thetis" 12. For an "eye-ram", see a cup in Rome Antiquarium Communale, 17417; M. Steinhart, *Das Motiv des Auges in der griechischen Bildkunst*, Mainz, 1995, pl. 5.1.
27. *ARV* 2, 581.4 (Museum photo, Copyright Jutta Tietz-Glagow).
bird is sitting on the phallos. The scene is humorous because the herm’s protective or religious functions are forgotten. Only its most striking feature is emphasised, its erection. Often a symbol of virility for men and fertility for women, it has become a perch for a bird. Birds must have perched on herms, but the phallos was not as long, and birds did not “kiss” herms, as our bird seems to be doing on the vase. It could also be a parody of supplication: men and women supplicated a herm by touching its chin or beard.

Visual puns combine contrasting images to provoke laughter. They corrupt the way in which iconography operates on vases. Figures may interact with decorative elements or with the actual frame of a composition instead of being inside it. This type of humour is based on visual memory and immediacy. Painters change small details in well-known series of images to produce a comical effect. This kind of humour is strictly visual. Pictures may refer incidentally to mythology or cultural phenomena, but they usually avoid narration. Painters simply amused themselves from time to time without thinking too much about the eventual purchaser. Painters were flesh and blood human beings, who laughed and joked as any man. J. Boardman writes: “They signed their works freely... threw mottoes and challenges, even let their figures speak in modern cartoon style. ‘As never Euphronios’ boasts Euthymides’”, on a belly amphora in Munich. Scholars often consider imagination to be trivial. But, could we not imagine in the late sixth-century Athens, a vase-painter in his workshop in the Potters quarter, sketching his tenth daily “eye-cup” and suddenly deciding to transform facetiously what was a serious image into a comic one?

2. SITUATION COMEDY

In situation comedy, humour derives largely from the particular conjunction of characters and circumstances. Often used on stage, in Old Comedy, it is the easiest way to provoke an immediate response from an audience. It functions similarly in vase-painting. It consists in a comical narrative. It is created by the intrusion in a scene close to reality of an element that disturbs an established order. It may also arise when there is a complete inversion of an initial situation. In situation comedy, it seems, at first, that only the situation arouses laughter. In fact, the performance of the actors is crucial: some hilarious plays can be ruined because they are performed badly. Likewise in vase-paintings, where the humour of a scene can be enhanced or lessened depending on the talent of the painter.

It is the final stage of the quest for the Erymanthian boar, Herakles’ delivery of the boar to Eurystheus, which contributes most effectively to the investigation of situation comedy. The
capture of the Erymanthian boar is the third task imposed by Eurystheus upon Herakles. When he brought it back to Mycenae alive, Eurystheus, terrified by Herakles and the living boar, threw himself into a pithos he had prepared as a hiding place. In black- and red-figure, Eurystheus hides in a pithos, a part-buried large storage jar. He observes Herakles’ return, bearing an enormous boar on his back or over his head. Eurystheus is usually shown waving his hands, in despair and supplication. On a cup in Paris, Herakles approaches Eurystheus who is hiding in his pithos. A small distance away stands Athena, a woman and an old man. Eurystheus is king of Mycenae. To see a man of superior status running for shelter in his own palace generally inspires amusement. Degradation is what makes the viewer laugh in this scene; “the fact of making the character base” as it is formulated in the Tractatus Coislinianus. In Euripides’ Herakleidai, the aged Iolaos, Herakles’ companion, hates the feeling that he might be considered a “stay-at-home” (oikourema), a word which usually refers to a woman staying-at-home. Eurystheus, on the other hand, is labelled a coward twice in the play. To find a king hiding in a pithos is amusing, but this representation occurs many times in vase-painting and in other art forms. After all, with so many depictions, we can assume that the viewers expected to see Eurystheus in a pithos, as Herakles delivered the living boar. To what extent was such a well-known picture amusing without the surprise effect? The frequency with which this scene was depicted suggests that it was not primarily surprise which was pleasurable to the viewers but the ridiculed surrogate of royalty and a comic archetype. The humour of this scene is based on the fact that despite Eurystheus’ belief that he has set yet another impossible task for Herakles, his cousin does return after all with his mission accomplished. Bergson says: “Not infrequently comedy sets before us a character who lays a trap in which he is the first to be caught. The plot of the villain, who is the victim of his own villainy, or the cheat cheated, forms the stock-in-trade of a good many plays.” Eurystheus, on behalf of Hera, orders Herakles to perform an impossible task, to bring the boar back alive. When Herakles returns, Eurystheus hides from the very boar he had required Herakles to capture. Herakles remains faithful to the king throughout the whole story, yet the king uses his monarchical power to force the tasks on him. By so doing, the situation becomes ironic because it is to the disadvantage of the king himself. Underlying these comic archetypes is the urge for natural justice. We could almost imagine the train of thoughts of a viewer: “Ha! Eurystheus gets what he deserves: Herakles did fulfil his task victoriously after all.” Perhaps the crux of the matter and the source of the urge for natural justice is that Eurystheus did not behave as a king should from the beginning.

33. Louvre, G17, ARV 2, 1599.18, 62.83; CVA, France, 17, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 10, pl. 4.1.
The comedy of these pictures lies in the irony of the situation, but also resides in the way the artists paint the story; the visual comedy of the scene can be more or less effective, depending on the imagination and the talent of the painter. Sometimes, the humour of a situation may be enhanced through surprising though minor changes in the composition of a picture. The painter may depict Eurystheus running into his pithos, or lifting the lid of the pithos and taking a peep from his hiding place at Herakles. Some painters show Herakles with one foot on the lip of the jar, preparing to tip the boar into the pithos. This position emphasizes Herakles’ superiority over his cousin, and reminds one that he should have rightfully been king instead of Eurystheus: a king manqué. A lekythos in Syracuse (fig. 7 a-b) is described by S. Luce: “A variant of this is found on one very remarkable vase… painted by a man with a delicious sense of humour, which shows on side A, Herakles lifting the boar, and on side B, Eurystheus in alarm getting into the pithos as rapidly as he can.”

Humorous archetypes exist also in everyday life situations. On a pelike in Munich (fig. 8 a), a woman is seated on a hillismos with her left hand on her thigh, reclining. In front of her is an elevated lamp stand, on the top of which has been placed a small bundle of cloth. A cat perches on the foot of the lamp stand. On the other side, a butcher is cutting meat with his machaira (fig. 8 b). On this pelike, the two sides must be observed as one complete narrative. The cat is climbing up the pole because it has sensed food under the cloth. It must be meat that the butcher on the other side of the vase has already cut and has placed there expressly to be out of reach of the cat. The woman seated in front of the pole is leaning her head on her right hand. Her eyes are shut, she is sleeping. It is rare to find a figure sleeping in such a fashion. In vase-painting, although there are a few pictures which include sleeping figures such as Herakles, Polyphemus, Ariadne, Medusa, Geryoneus, Alkyoneus, most sleeping female figures are maenads about to be raped by satyrs. It seems that during the figures’ sleep, something always happens. Satyrs try to rape maenads, or rob Herakles’ weapons, Odysseus blinds Polyphemus and Perseus beheads Medusa. The only two scenes where nothing happens are a woman holding a sleeping child in her arms44, and an archer sleeping on a cup in Basel (fig. 9)45. On this last example, a Scythian, with his eyes closed, is asleep. The scene is divided by a thick line: above, the Scythian is sleeping, and below, is a large rhyton. It is almost like a rebus puzzle: a sleeping Scythian added to a drinking horn means “he drank too much and fell asleep.”


40. ABV, 375 . 218, from Puteoli, 10, p. 210–211.

41. S. B. Luce, Studies of the exploits of Herakles on vases, AJD, 28, 1924, p. 313.

42. S. B. Luce, Studies of the exploits of Herakles on vases, AJD, 28, 1924, p. 313.


44. Red-figure alabastron, Providence (RI), Rhode Island School of Design, 25 . 088, ARV2, 624 . 88.

45. Courtesy of the museum, photo Claire Niggli.
7 a-b. Black-figure lekythos. Syracuse, Mus. arch. regionale Paolo Orsi, 21965.

8 a-b. Red-figure pelike. Munich, Antikensammlungen, 2347.


asleep". If this archer is a "Persian", the Greek painter is simply mocking the miserable warriors in the other camp, who drink instead of training. But if we consider this archer’s appearance à la lettre, he is dressed as a Scythian. The Scythians who would have come into contact with Athenian painters frequently were most likely members of the Athenian police force, the "Scythian archers"\(^46\). A common expression during symposia was "to drink like a Scythian" (skythizein: to drink immoderately)\(^47\). As he is drunk and asleep, he is incapable of guarding anything. Such a parallel may suggest that the woman on the pelike in Munich was supposed to keep an eye on the meat, but fell asleep "on duty".

Women were frequently the target of male jokes and criticism. On a red-figure hydria in Madrid (fig. 10)\(^48\), attributed to the Berlin Painter, two women are standing at a fountain house, which consists of a Doric column erected on a one-stepped krepis with a lion’s head spout shown in profile. From their gestures and their poses they seem to be conversing. The woman on the left is drawn smaller than the other to fit into the composition, because she is carrying a hydria on her head. The "taller" woman has left hers beneath the fountain spout. Both women wear a tiara which indicates that they are neither slaves nor servants, but probably citizens\(^49\). On the far right, a hydria is overflowing with water which is pouring out of the lion-head spout\(^50\). The woman on the left is carrying her hydria vertically which implies it is full, and that she is about to leave. Moreover, her feet are pointing towards the left. Her head, however, is turned towards the other woman. With these simple elements, the overflowing hydria, the gestures of discussion, the indications of departure of the woman on the left and her lingering (head turned right) the painter has shown two women gossiping (lalein phyla-rein)\(^51\). Because they are lost in conversation, the woman on the right forgot her own hydria under the fountain head. A similar scene of gossiping ladies (they all wear chitons and himatia and hair-fillets) is shown on a black figure lekythos in Thébes\(^52\). Four women are standing in a queue at a fountain. Three of them carry their hydriai horizontally on their heads, they hold them with one hand and make gestures of discussion with the other. The first woman looks round to chat with the one behind. She has misplaced her hydria below a lion’s-head spout from which water streams half in the vase and half outside. This is a typical scene of situation comedy. Aristophanes would surely have agreed. In Thesmophoriazusae\(^53\), Woman “A” complains about Euripides who describes them as “gossips” but then, as L. Taafee says: “After this indictment of Euripides, she turns to a revelation of the truth about women... In short, her...
speech has revealed that Euripides actually tells the truth about women." These two vases are the only ones I am aware of, among the many representations of ordinary women filling their hydriai at fountain houses, or at fountains, in which women have let their hydriai overflow. This detail is shown in a different context on a hydria in St. Petersburg, also attributed to the Berlin Painter. Polyxene is at a fountain, whilst Achilles is crouching behind. Her hydria is overflowing. This detail probably indicates that she has just noticed him and, in her terror, has forgotten her hydria. Usually, in the depictions of the flight of Polyxene, her hydria is spilled as on a hydria fragment in Paris, or broken as on a hydria in London, yet, with the exception of the St. Petersburg vase, the hydria is never shown overflowing.

The interest of the hydria in Madrid and the polévkh in Munich, as well as many other comic or serious paintings, is in what we may refer to as visual immediacy, the fact that everything in the picture is happening at the same time and painted consequently in such a way that the viewer must "read" the picture in a global way. If someone was to describe the situation, he would have to describe the protagonists, the place, the actions which happen at the same time, etc. On the hydria in Madrid there is an immediate impression, as if everything was seen at the same time. On the Munich polévkh, if one observed only a part of the picture or glanced only at one side and then at the other without creating a mental picture of the whole narrative, the sleeping woman would not be comic. On the hydria in Madrid the whole narrative is displayed on one side, but if one did not notice the detail of the overflowing hydria, the scene would appear to be quite commonplace. It would remain an odd detail of no particular consequence to the general meaning of the picture. Details in comic pictures are as important as the reading of a vase in its totality. Vase-paintings often share similar compositions, and it is often easy to take some explanations for granted and yet to dismiss other more unusual details because the general meaning is considered to be the "usual one". Pictures are structured, and work within a strict framework of visual codes. Sometimes, an unusual element, which does not seem at first to fit in the picture, is not the result of a mistake made by the painter or a detail that can be left aside. It may totally change the eventual interpretation in the most unexpected ways.

3. CARICATURE

A caricature is a grotesque or ludicrous representation of persons or things by the exaggeration of their most characteristic and striking features. Deformity and ugliness made people

57. Louvre, CP10651 (in the Beazley Archive Database, no. 12421).
58. B. M., 1899.7–21.4, ARV², 297.15, 296, 1643; LIMC, VII, pl. 346, s.v. "Polyxene" 19.
laugh. The idea that deformity could have been a subject of amusement (from Thersites in Homer to dwarfs at banquets) is in perfect agreement with the ideal of kalokagathia. Anything other than beauty and goodness was ridiculous and ridiculed. Hephaistos, pygmies and dwarfs used to arouse laughter as representatives of otherness. Because caricature and stage masks of comedy share exaggerated and abnormal rigidity the first is often confused by scholars with the second\(^59\). Masks are caricatures. Moreover, when painters want to show figures wearing masks they are able to do so clearly.

On an aryballos in Paris (fig. 11)\(^60\), a naked dwarf carries a hare on his left shoulder between two draped men in a surgery. He is infibulated, balding, and bearded. The young (beardless) doctor is shown on the other side treating a patient under the supervision of a man seated opposite him. The other patients stand in a queue. Among all these fine men, the hairy chested dwarf turns around to face one of the other patients. The latter weighs heavily on his cane and keeps his other hand to his hip in a relaxed fashion. The incongruity of the dwarf's presence in the queue is surprising and amusing. None of the patients carry a satchel with money to pay the doctor. The dwarf carries a dead hare on his shoulder: could it be his method of payment? The dwarf is infibulated. This is comical for the following reason: infibulation is a common practice essentially among athletes at the palaestra. The only painting (fig. 12) which displays dwarfs training, shows them with oversized genitals. Like satyrs, dwarfs are often shown macrophallic. It is well understood that infibulated satyrs are a visual joke. Infibulated dwarfs should be considered so too. The hare indicates an erotic context, well-known in vase-painting of the erastes and eromenos. The erastes asks a favour (charizein) of the eromenos by offering him a hare\(^61\), sometimes a dead hare. The humorous effect is created by the presence of the hairy dwarf at the place of the expected handsome eromenos. V. Dasen says: "The dwarf is in the same age-group as his erastes, while in courting scenes one of the lovers is older. The unusual location of this meeting enhances the comedy of the parody; the two men are shown not in a palaestra, a place suited to the appraisal of naked bodies, but in a clinic, among sick or injured people\(^62\). The presence of a flying Eros, hovering exactly above the "beautiful couple" on the shoulder of the aryballos is another assurance of the erotic interpretation\(^63\). On a pelike in St. Petersburg (fig. 12)\(^64\), two dwarfs exercise in the korykeion, the boxing grounds, hitting a large punch-bag\(^65\). This is a hapax in Athenian vase-painting. The bag has the appearance of a sow that one of the dwarfs hits with his hands and feet. As

59. See for example the caricatured faces of all the figures in an apotheosis of Herakles on an oinochoe in Paris, Louvre, N1408, \(\text{ARFH}^2, 1535 . 54, 1690\); Boardman, \(\text{ARFH}^2, 11,\) fig. 321. I have followed this line of reasoning for almost every caricature found on many kantlers from the Kabeirion sanctuary, near Thebes, which, through the use of caricature, parody mythology and everyday life situations.
60. \(\text{ARFH}^2, 813 . 38\) (Copyright Museum).
61. See cup by the Clinic Painter, Paris, Cab. Méd., 812, \(\text{ARFH}^2, 808, 811 . 97\); A. De Balbian, Catalogue des vases peints de la Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, 1902, p. 471; fig. 110.
62. V. Dasen [see n. 60] p. 222–223.
64. \(\text{ARFH}^2, 1134 . 11\) (drawing A. G. Mitchell).
65. See Philostr., Gymn., 97.
with grotesque pygmies\textsuperscript{66}, dwarfs are used in a ludicrous fashion, and the St. Petersburg dwarfs have a dim-witted caricatured face, brought out by their thick lips and large droopy eyes. Dwarfs never trained at the palaestra; it is the dwelling of free and beautiful youths. This could very well be a parody of the usual boxer, who is traditionally depicted as a stout and strong athlete in vase-painting. Boxing athletes were easy to parody because of their stocky appearance.

\textsuperscript{66} See for example a rhyton in St Petersburg, Hermitage, 679, \textit{ARV} 2, 382. 188, 1649; Boardman, \textit{ARFH}, I, 233: “realistic plump dwarfs”, fig. 258.
Physiognomy was used to explain some unusual figures in vase-painting. The close examination of an individual’s facial features and morphology might reveal the disposition of the mind, the character. In the works of some vase-painters, such as Onesimos, or even Euphronios, it is tempting to speak of physiognomy, because some figures are differentiated by hairy chests, longer hair or bushy eyebrows. These paintings have undoubtedly what Beazley called “a touch of naturalism”. To speak of physiognomy is however unnecessary and possibly anachronistic. As far as individualisation in vase-painting is concerned, precise identification was not sought by the artisans and physiognomy was reduced to the production of “types”. The “Aesop cup” in the Vatican City, on which a caricatured bearded man seems to discuss with a fox, is often compared to an askos in Paris (fig. 13). On one side a bald deformed man leans on a staff; the other side shows a roaring lion. The man’s body is absurdly small compared to his enormous head, larger than the whole body. He is leaning on a staff; his cloak is folded under his left arm and hangs off the staff. This bald man is strikingly caricatured. His attitude is that of many nonchalant strollers at the palaestra. With such a huge head and pensive attitude, this figure could be a caricature of a sophist; not a sophist in particular but what the common artisan in the Potters quarter thought of sophists, who spent their time thinking, or chatting at the palaestra. Views on sophists, or philosophers in antiquity were diverse. In Clouds Aristophanes gives a very critical and comical view of what was probably thought of intellectuals and “wandering wonder-workers” in Athens by most Athenians: “Bah! Good-for-nothings, I know. You’re talking about those vagabonds, those pallid faces, those barefooted wanderers; “lazy, supplied with food for doing nothing”; “who never went to the baths to wash.” Socrates himself, in a discussion on the needs of the philosopher, clearly despises the body, while holds in the highest regard the soul. According to D. Metzler the lion is as symbol of hoplite virtue routing out the sophist parasite. The vase-painters are possibly mocking wandering sophists, leaving one banquet to attend another. Some of them were careless of their looks and of what others could think of their external appearance. On a cup fragment in Athens (fig. 14), a man is crouching in order to defecate. He is shown in a rare

68. See cup in Basel, Antikenmus., BS439, ARV², 323. 96, 1604; Boardman, ARFH, 1, fig. 230.
69. Compare Herculane’s most beautiful and beard, his fine eyebrows, to Antaios’ on the calyx-krater, Paris, Louvre, G103, ARV², 14. 2, 1584, 1619; Boardman, ARFH, 1, fig. 23.
73. For a different view, using the principles of physiognomy, see V. Zinserling, Physiognomische Studien in der epigraphischen und klassischen Vasenmalerei, WZ Ros- nod, 16, 1967, p. 571-579.
75. Sophists called themselves frontistai, “thinkers”.
76. Ar., Nub., 102-103.
77. Ar., Nub., 354.
78. Ar., Nub., 831.
81. See Ar., Nub., 146-147, in which a fox jumps from Kharephon’s head to Socrates’ which implies that both are flea-ridden and dirty.
82. After B. Graef, E. Langlotz, Die archäe Vasen von der Akropolis zu Athen, 2, Berlin, 1933, pl. 83, no. 1073.
attitude\textsuperscript{83}; he pinches his nose in a comic way because of the smell. He seems to be standing amongst stones. His head is huge in comparison to his body, as in the previous scenes. This enables the painter to exaggerate the figure’s protruding lips, unkempt hair, large nose, fluffy beard and to show his teeth\textsuperscript{84}.

Caricature was a free exercise to the extent that certain relatively “inexpensive” media made it possible. Even though vase-paintings could be exquisitely wrought, whether the finest Athenian or the \textit{kantharoi} produced for the Kabirion, they were not considered to be great objects of art in antiquity in comparison to wood-panelled paintings or wall paintings. Thus, the freedom of expression of vase-painter was that much greater, taking into account market needs and ever changing fashion.

4. PARODY

Vase-painters who produced parodies had to be certain that the viewer would recognise a traditional scene, or a canonical motif, by giving sufficient details, but, at the same time, they needed to include other well-chosen details to transform the canonical picture into something comical. Vase-paintings are not “read” as texts. The codes of imagery were obvious to people living in Athens in the fifth century B. C. and some scholars may feel that two thousand and five hundred years is too long a span of time to understand these codes without an appropriate lexicon. However, by examining many thousands of paintings, patterns and codes of imagery emerge, and the pictures become, to a certain extent, as “decipherable” as texts.

On a red-figure neck-amphora in Naples (fig. 15)\textsuperscript{85}, a winged female figure wearing a tiara is pursuing a young man. He is a hunter, wearing the \textit{petasos}, a \textit{chlamys} and holding hunting lances. The winged female has dropped a \textit{kerykeion}. She cannot be a Nike nor can she be Eos pursuing Kephalos or Tithonos. Here the \textit{kerykeion} indicates clearly that the winged female must be Iris. She is the female counterpart to Hermes as the divine messenger and carries a \textit{kerykeion}, symbol of messengers. She is usually winged, stands motionless or runs, but not after a young man. The Naples Iris’ feet are above the ground as if in an imaginary flight. It is more common to see Iris pursued than pursuing: depictions of Iris pursued by satyrs are well known. The young hunter is running away, casting an eye behind to see how close Iris is. She is not trying to deliver a message but trying to get hold of the young man. In this scene, the key is the \textit{kerykeion}. In many scenes, it has been argued, objects such as drinking horns are not “real objects”, only signs of the presence of wine. But in depictions of Iris, the \textit{kerykeion} is

\textsuperscript{83} See also a cup, Boston, M. F. A., Res 08.31.3, ARV\textsuperscript{13}, 174.22, E. Vermes, Some erotica in Boston, \textit{Ant. Kunst} 12, 1969, p. 14, fig. 14. A man with a cloak over his shoulders, wreath and a staff, bends forward, having defecated, and cleans himself with a stone. See Ar., \textit{Pax}, 1228-1239.

\textsuperscript{84} See also a cup fr., Athens, Nat. Mus.; E. Keuls (see n. 30) p. 311, fig. 16.

\textsuperscript{85} ARV\textsuperscript{2}, 1058.117 (drawing A. G. Mitchell).
never dropped, she consistently holds it tightly. She must have dropped it in her haste. The series of pictures that come to mind is Menelaos dropping his sword and running towards Helen, under the influence of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, as on an oinochoe in the Vatican City (fig. 16). In this abundant series, Menelaos drops his sword because it has become use-

86. See for example red-figure neck-amphora, Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmus., 203, ARV², 202 73, LIMC, V, pl. 489, s.v. "Iris" I 19.
87. ARV², 1173 5, after A. Furtwängler, K. Reichhold, Griechische Vasenmalerei, Munich, 1904-32, III, 307, fig. 147.
less in so far as lust has taken over his desire for revenge and the recovery of his honour. In her erotic pursuit, Iris drops her *kerykeion*. In this parody, the goddess is made more human and thus degraded. The other side shows a youth with sword pursuing a woman. It is not a coincidence that this precise scene should be depicted: it recalls Menelaos’ episode of the “fallen sword”.

In vase-paintings, parodies can be achieved in different ways. Satyrs are often used. In some mythological scenes their presence is appropriate; in others they seem out-of-place, because they are used to ridicule serious, tragic or heroic deeds. Some scenes have been understood as depictions of satyr plays. In most cases however these satyrs were used by painters to mock known depictions. F. Lissarrague in his numerous publications on the subject has not researched humour as such, but he has analysed most aspects of the playfulness of satyrs and, in his works on satyrs and others, has shed new light on vase-painters’ visual games.

A satyr is a hybrid mythological being, half-human and half-animal. His ears and tail are those of a horse. He is also identifiable as a satyr from a snub, squashed nose, a bald forehead, a bushy beard and an erect penis. The moral character of satyrs is nothing but a list of foibles. In literature, satyrs are cowards, drunkards and lustful creatures. The satyr is the antithesis of the hero, and is considered less than a man: in this respect he is similar to an ape, which was considered by the Greeks as a laughable imitation of man. Satyrs are called “beasts” and “apes” in Sophocles’ *Ichneutai*. They are comic figures per se. Satyrs are found in conventional mythological scenes in the black- and red-figure techniques, ranging in date from the early sixth century until the late fifth century. Satyrs often escort Dionysos at his wedding with Ariadne. They are also often represented at vintages, or escorting Dionysos in *The return of Hephaistos*. Satyrs are shown on numerous vases serving and drinking pure unmixed wine from wineskins or amphorae.

Finally, satyrs pursue maenads on countless vases. The anthropic representations of human and satyr love-making are represented on each side of a *pelike* in London. On one side a man and a woman, both fully clothed, hold each other in an embrace and gaze in each others eyes. On the other side, an ithyphallic satyr runs away with a captive maenad on his shoulder. As we have seen earlier, satyrs destabilise traditional iconography. If satyrs can jump head first into kraters, and can play with the actual decoration of a vase, it seems probable that they could also be used to parody canonical mythological scenes. They are elements of disorder which by their mischievous presence make common scenes unexpected and surprising.

The use of satyrs in parody is still controversial, although the idea has been proposed by a number of scholars. As soon as satyrs are found in place of famous heroes or pestering them, most scholars have turned to satyr plays to explain the presence of the satyrs in such unusual scenes.

Satyr plays appear in the fifth century. Unfortunately, we possess only fragments of satyr plays. Scholars are usually confronted with mere titles of plays. Before the discovery of papyrus fragments in the course of the twentieth century, scholars worked on quotations from satyr plays in the writings of various ancient authors. Only two satyr plays are known to us in a substantial form: *Ichnenai* of Sophocles presented about 445, and *Cyclops* of Euripides presented about 440. According to R. Green: "They [satyrs] often seem, in a 'carnavalesque' way, to have upset the status quo, the normal order of things, only to have order restored at the end of the play. Their function was one of humour and release". To look for the content of these lost plays in vase-paintings is highly tempting. It is also satisfying to scholars to seek literary parallels for incongruous pictures, and to explain them through satyr plays. Most authors who have studied representations of satyr play associate specific satyr plays to some vases produced in the fifth century. The general tendency is to consider that vases illustrate drama and not that vase-painting was a popular art form, with its own traditions.

Satyr plays were parodies of known myths: the hero was never satyrised, but the chorus was made up of 12 to 15 actors disguised as satyrs. The criteria used to recognise a satyr player are a smooth or hairy loincloth (also called by some scholars trunks or shorts) to which actors attached a tail and an erect phallos; satyr masks are sometimes held in hand. Some scenes in which satyrs are in the presence of an auletes may have been inspired by satyr play. It is clear from the famous Pronomos vase in Naples, that because masks covered the entire head, painters gave other details to let the viewer distinguish actors represented on a vase from mythological beings. An actor wears the satyr trunks, a satyr does not.

Satyrs’ activities often include badgering heroes, but there is no compelling need to turn to drama to explain such pictures. Often iconography alone can easily provide an adequate

99. Volute-krater, Naples, Mus. arch. naz., ARV 2, 1336. 1, 1704; M. Bieber [see n. 97] fig. 52.
interpretation. On a column-krater in Athens, Prometheus has just thrashed two satyrs who are rubbing their backs and chests. Satyrs like to steal. What could be more amusing than to harass Prometheus? Prometheus is the most renowned thief in mythology, having robbed Zeus himself of his fire. Satyrs stealing Prometheus’ stolen fire is a comical reversal of the initial situation. On a black-figure oinochoe in Oxford, produced in the 530s, before satyr plays were first introduced in Athens, Dionysos, while reclining, is watching intently a satyr dance before him. While thus engrossed, another satyr robs him of his wineskin. A number of vases show satyrs (none are wearing satyr trunks) stealing Herakles’ weapons in his sleep. They range in date from the last decade of the sixth century until the end of the fifth. The last cup of the “series”, in Ferrara, was produced in the 440s. There are no signs of the theatre in this scene. Even if the earlier Padula krater was linked to the theatre because of the presence of an auletes, by the time the Ferrara cup was produced the leitmotif of a sleeping Herakles being robbed by satyrs had already become a stock scene. With the one exception of the Padula krater and its aulos-player, not a single scene depicting Herakles being robbed by satyrs shows a theatrical connotation. All are based on the same comical motif of Herakles’ temporary powerlessness. Herakles, the strongest, proudest and most reckless hero in Greek mythology, is powerless. In these scenes, satyrs, as always, are cowards and mischievous characters, which take advantage of the indisposition of the hero (who is shown either asleep or ascending to Olympus) so as to pilfer his weapons. This series of vases starts in the late sixth century and continues throughout the fifth. It was therefore a comical motif, already known in black-figure and treated in various fashions in later red-figure.

The Return of Hephaistos is another traditional scene dating from at least the early sixth century. On the François Vase a drunk Hephaistos rides a mule among ithyphallic satyrs. On a calyx-krater in Vienna, Hephaistos, with a wineskin, hammer and tongs walks in the company of Dionysos who is holding a thyrsos and a kantharos. An actor of satyr play playing the kithara and wearing the smooth satyr trunks, decorated with a cross, leads the group. This is

100. Nat. Mus., 1167, Aré, 1104. 6; F. Brommer, Satyrs, Berlin, 1959, fig. 44.
the only example from at least one hundred and fifty scenes of Hephaistos’ Return which depicts a satyr player. While it may be a good illustration of the interplay between drama and vase-painting, it should not be used as an example of a direct inspiration from a specific scene in a play. The *Return of Hephaistos* existed a century before the krater in Vienna and antedates by many decades the creation of comedy and satyr play; it is such a traditional scene that the krater in Vienna’s singular theatrical connotation could be considered as a way of saying to the viewer: “This is a funny story as are satyr plays”\(^{108}\). Not only are the non-theatrical representations overwhelming, but they were already depicted many decades before satyr plays were produced.

When satyrs are the main protagonists of a scene, especially if they are not set in mythological scenes, they cannot be satyr players. On one side of a volute-krater in Munich (fig. 17 a)\(^{109}\), ithyphallic satyrs are practising the *pentathlon*: discus, javelin, long jump, and boxing are represented. Two wearing long robes are holding big objects, in the way trainers in athletic scenes hold a forked stick. On the other side (fig. 17 b), humans are practising the *pentathlon*. From left to right are a trainer (recognisable from his forked stick), two boxers, an akontist, an auletes, another akontist, a *diskobolos*, a second auletes and a runner. Because satyrs are set in the civic space, in such an unexpected performance, this painting has been considered to be inspired by satyr play. Two different plays have been cited to interpret the picture. Aristias, in 467, presented a satyr play of his father Pratinas called *Palaistai*, which

108. See vases on which satyrs try to rape Hephaistos’ mule: cup, New York, M. M. A., 12. 234. 4, *ARV*², 630. 2; F. Brommer [see n. 106] pl. 2. 2. See also calyx-krater, Paris, *ARV*², G162, 186. 47; F. Brommer [see n. 106] pl. 7. 1.

involved satyrs boxing\textsuperscript{110}, and Aeschylus’ \textit{Isthmiastai} in which satyrs prepared the Games at Corinth\textsuperscript{111}. Both sides of the vase are clearly one ensemble. The presence of an aulos-player in a scene with satyrs is often used as proof of a drama setting. In fact, his presence may be irrelevant: hundreds of vases in black- and red-figure show aulos-players among athletes where neither satyrs nor actors are present. According to M. Vos: “Athletes were accompanied by flute-music during their exercises in the palaestra, and at contests, where the public paid attention not only to the athletic performances, but to the music as well. A good flute-player was so highly appreciated that in Olympia a stele was erected in honour of the auletes Pythokritos of Silyon who, in the early sixth century played six times at the Olympic Games for the \textit{pentathlon} [Paus. 6.14.10]\textsuperscript{112}. This scene is a parody, not a satyr play. A viewer simply needed to turn the vase and look on its other side, to find human athletes practising the \textit{pentathlon}. There are two phallic jokes in this picture: the trainers are usually recognisable from their forked sticks (fig. 17\textbf{b}). The satyr-trainers (fig. 17\textbf{a}) carry phallos-sticks or giant dildoes instead\textsuperscript{113}, similar to the one a satyr on amphora in Boston holds above his head\textsuperscript{114}. The second joke is the satyrs’ permanent sexual erection. Satyrs are always in erection and not only are human athletes never shown in erection but they are almost always infibulated, which of course prevents erection: their penises are firmly attached to ensure comfort during exercise\textsuperscript{115}.

On a 	extit{pelike} in Genoa (fig. 18\textbf{a})\textsuperscript{116}, an infibulated satyr is seated on a rock. He faces a draped satyr (fig. 18\textbf{b}). The first satyr’s attitude is relaxed; his hands are folded around his left knee to avoid rocking backwards. He sits upright and is attentive to the other satyr’s movements and speech. The speaker’s head is tilted slightly backwards as if he was searching for inspiration. He keeps his left hand on his hip while making a sweeping gesture with his right arm, inadvertently uncovering his huge erection. These two satyrs might be parodying an orator and his audience. A neck-amphora in Paris\textsuperscript{117} (fig. 19) shows a man with one arm draped in his mantle, standing on a podium. In front of him, a listener is seated on a rock. The first satyr’s attitude is relaxed; his hands are folded around his left knee to avoid rocking backwards. He sits upright and is attentive to the other satyr’s movements and speech. The speaker’s head is tilted slightly backwards as if he was searching for inspiration. He keeps his left hand on his hip while making a sweeping gesture with his right arm, inadvertently uncovering his huge erection. These two satyrs might be parodying an orator and his audience. A neck-amphora in Paris\textsuperscript{118} (fig. 19) shows a man with one arm draped in his mantle, standing on a podium. In front of him, a listener is seated on a rock. The speaker’s head is tilted slightly backwards as if he was searching for inspiration. He keeps his left hand on his hip while making a sweeping gesture with his right arm, inadvertently uncovering his huge erection. In the same passage he even refers to a statue of Aeschines\textsuperscript{119} showing the orator with his arm wrapped in a mantle. According to Aeschines himself, referring to the time of Pericles, “it was considered a moral failing to move the arm freely, as is common nowadays, and for this reason speakers did their best to avoid it”\textsuperscript{120}. In the same passage he even refers to a statue of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} E. Simon [see n. 97] p. 130.
\item \textsuperscript{111} E.g. F. Brommer, \textit{Satyrspiele}, Berlin, 1959, p. 60, fig. 59.
\item \textsuperscript{112} M. F. Vos, “Aulodic and Auletic contests”, in \textit{Enthousiamos}, Festschrift für M. J. Hemelrijk, Amsterdam, 1986, p. 121.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Boardman, \textit{ARFH}, I, 111 “His [Nikoxenos P.] satyr athletes might also be conceived in a mocking spirit (their trainer uses a large phallos in place of a cane).”
\item \textsuperscript{114} Amphora in Boston, M. F. A., 98.882, \textit{ARV}, 279.7; J. D. Beazley, \textit{Attic red figured vases in American museums}, 1967, 56, fig. 97.
\item \textsuperscript{115} M. F. Vos, CILA, Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, 1, 1983, 20–21; see also E. J. Dinges, \textit{Male infibulation}, London, 1929.
\item \textsuperscript{116} \textit{ARV}, 2.62.37 (drawing A. G. Mitchell).
\item \textsuperscript{117} \textit{ARV}, 272.7, after E. Pottier, \textit{Vases antiques du Louvre}, Paris, 1897–1922, pl. 130.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Early Augustan copy of a statue ca. 320 B. C., Naples, Mus. naz.; P. Zanker [see n. 72] p. 46, fig. 26.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Alexandre G. Mitchell, \textit{In Tim.}, 25.
\end{itemize}
Solon in the Agora of Salamis who kept his arm hidden beneath his mantle. Solon’s statue and a similar statue erected in honour of Aeschines, probably were the reasons why Demosthenes mocked Aeschines by saying that he stood like a “handsome statue before the Assembly”120. According to P. Zanker: “The orator was expected to demonstrate extreme modesty and self-control in his appearances before the Assembly, and particularly to avoid any kind of demonstrative gestures”121. He adds that “the motif of one arm wrapped in the cloak had been a topos of the Athenian citizen since the fifth century and would continue into late antiquity, both in art and in life, as a visual symbol of sophrosyne”122. Our satyrs on the neck-amphora in Genoa are pretending to be what they cannot be: citizens of the Athenian Polis. While the seated and comically infibulated satyr seems to strike the correct pose, the other has lost his self-control and his temporary sophrosyne (ethical and moral correctness) in the excitement of oratory, making sweeping gestures and drawing the attention of the viewer to his erect penis, thus to his satyrin nature. Conversing citizens may make a large gesture with one arm as the two figures on a stamnos in Frankfurt123, but they keep their other hand beneath their mantles and remain draped. There are many vases which display draped satyrs standing, running or dancing alone in the tondo124; some may be leaning on a staff or conversing with a youth as on a chous in London125. They are probably visual puns playing on the thousands of depictions of citizens, often seen leaning on a staff, standing alone or discussing with youths.

According to H. A. Shapiro: “When the Greeks wanted to express their deepest feelings, their fears and fantasies, they put them into myth. So, for example, satyrs, the mythological bestial followers of Dionysos thought to be in a permanent state of sexual arousal, are occasionally shown on vases performing sexual acrobatics (with each other or with maenads) far removed from the stylised poses and gestures of erastes and eromenos”126. As always, there are comical exceptions. On a palike in St. Petersburg (fig. 20127, a draped satyr, leaning on a knotted staff, presents a hare to a seated youth on a block. The hare is a well-known love gift from the erastes to the eromenos and, as H. A. Shapiro argues, it is usually depicted in stylised poses and gestures in vase-painting. A neck-amphora in Rome (fig. 21)128, displays a similar scene to that on the palike in St. Petersburg: a man leaning on his knotted staff offering a hare to a youth. The satyr on the St. Petersburg palike holds the animal in extension, in exactly the same fashion as the erastes on the neck-amphora in Rome. The ultimate and most unlikely attitude one expects from a satyr is one of style and modesty.

120. Dem., De Cor., 129.
121. P. Zanker [see n. 72] p. 45.
122. P. Zanker [see n. 72] p. 49.
123. Mus. für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, B411, Pute, 552, CVA, Frankfurt-am-Main, 2, pl. 74. 1.
125. B. M., E332; F. A. Beck, Album of Greek education, Sydney, 1975, pl. 17. 89.
126. H. A. Shapiro [see n. 63], p. 58.
127. ARV², 531. 35 (drawing A. G. Mitchell).
128. ARV², 284. 3 (Copyright Museum) See also a palike in Pergam, Baron E. de Rothschild, ARIV, 531. 54 (in the Beasley Archive Database, no. 200010).

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When satyrs are not represented as a chorus but replace heroes in well-known mythological scenes, they cannot be satyr-players. I will only give two examples of these parodies. There is an unusual representation of the game of ephedrismos (from ephedrizein, “to be carried on someone’s back”) on a neck-amphora in Boston (fig. 22). The game consisted of trying to knock down an erect stone by throwing balls or stones from a distance. Players who missed the target had to carry the winners on their backs blindly, as the winners covered the

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129. Among many other examples, compare a lekythos on which a satyr is carrying a lampyris and a severed head [Paris, Louvre, CA1728, ARV², 677, 10; F. Brommer, Satyrspiele, Berlin, 1935, 13, fig. 25] to a lekythos showing Persus running after having severed Medusa’s head [Sao Paulo, Mus. Arte, ARV², 1668; LIMC, VII, pl. 500, c.c: “Per- sour” 163]. Compare the old and bent satyr pulled towards a cauldron by a maenad on a bell-krater in Ancona [Mus. Arch. Nat., 5106; B. Simon [see n. 97], pl. 38] to Pelias about to be murdered by Medusa on a cup in the Vatican City [Mus. Vat., 16538; M. Schmidt, “Medea at work”, in G. Tsetskhladze et al. eds., Periplous, London, 2000, p. 267, fig. 3]. The other side of the Ancona parody shows a satyr family; the satyr on the left seems to be playing with a young satyr child with his maenad-mother to the right. Pelias or Papposilenos was triumphantly rejuvenated but because this is the world of satyrs and comic exaggeration, he has not become a youthful satyr in his twenties, but a satyr boy. The rejuvenation was a little too successful! Compare two column-kraters attributed to the same painter both depicting Jason and the golden fleece, but one shows Jason [New York, M. A., 34.11.7, ARV², 524, 28; G. Halber, Jason, Pristan angestelmt, Bild, Suppl. 16, Rome, 1995, pl. 17] which the other shows a satyr instead of Jason and Dionysos instead of Athena [Bologna, Mus. Civ. Arch., 190, ARV², 524.27; B. Schmidt et al. eds., Die griechischen Satyrspiele, Darmstadt, 1999, pl. 12]. Compare lekythos showing a satyr pulling a youth from a cave to three seated goldkronen [Tübingen, Eberhard-Karls-Univ., Arch. Inst., D68, ARV², 117, 229; CVA, Tübingen, 3, pl. 47, 1–6] to a neck-amphora fr. in Copenhagen [Nat. Mus., 19440, ARV², 86, 15; LIMC, VIII, pl. 150, c.n. “Paridis iudicium”]. Compare the Thetian juppiter-locus seated at front of the sphinx on a steatite in Würzburg [Liege, Martin von Wagner Mus., ZZ20, on loan from Tokyo, coll. Fujita; LIMC, VIII, pl. 711, c.n. “Silence” 160] to the usual scene on a hydria in Ro- zal, Aristokrates und Sammlung Ludwig, 1, pl. 48–1–3. See also a policle in Paris, Louvre, G228, ARV², 290, 13, 254; CVA, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 6, III, pl. 74–55, pl. 44–1, 45–2–3, 8.

losers’ eyes with their hands, all the way to another stone called a dioros. This game is represented in both black- and red-figure. On a neck-amphora in Copenhagen, two ithyphallic satyrs are playing ἐφεδρίμασις. One of them is carrying the other on his back, his eyes covered by the carried satyr. He is walking towards the dioros. It is somewhat incongruous yet nonetheless comical to find satyrs playing a human game. On the neck-amphora in Boston (fig. 22)

produced a little earlier than the oinochoe in Berlin, two satyrs seem to be in the middle of a game of ephedrismos. A third, with a sprig in hand, is running after them, holding onto the tail of the carried satyr. On the other side of the vase a satyr leans on a staff. The difference between this depiction and other representations of satyrs and humans playing ephedrismos, is that the satyr being carried is an elderly white haired papposilenos. No depiction of ephedrismos ever shows an old man or a papposilenos. There is, however, another very common mythological scene in which an old man is carried on a warrior’s back: Aineas fleeing Troy in flames with his son Askanios running beside him and his father Anchises on his back. This scene is usually depicted in black-figure but is also present in red-figure. Anchises’ hair is usually white, to indicate his advanced years, and hence his inability to run beside his son. On a neck-amphora in Munich (fig. 23)\(^{133}\), women are fleeing beside the main protagonists: Aineas is running while carrying his father. Askanios, is running after them, holding onto his father’s leg. On a neck-amphora in Würzburg\(^ {134}\), a fleeing Aineas is carrying Anchises and bends down to take his son by the arm. He is leaving a building to his left, perhaps representing Troy. Most of the scenes in black-figure show Anchises mounted piggy-back fashion on Aineas. In red-figure, as on a red-figure hydria in Naples\(^ {135}\), Anchises’ position has changed: he is back to back with Aineas, who holds him from the chest. Askanios walks beside his father. The scene depicted on the Boston neck-amphora is burlesque. Decent and heroic figures, such as Aineas and Anchises, as well as a tragic situation, such as leaving a destroyed and burning Troy, are comically debased by the use of satyrs. The painter’s visual game is magnified and the subsequent amusement heightened by reference to satyrs playing (the human) ephedrismos on the one hand and the epic flight of Aineas on the other.

On a hydria in Champaign-Urbana\(^ {136}\), Herakles strides to the left, carrying apples in his left arm and with his right waves his club above his head. Three women stand in the centre of the scene. To the right, a snake is coiled around a fruit tree bearing apples. This scene depicts a version of one of Herakles’ deeds: to bring back to Eurystheus the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides. In some depictions Atlas helps Herakles\(^ {137}\), in others the Hesperides themselves offer him the apples. Our hydria shows the latter version. Traditionally, the guardian of the tree was a fierce dragon with a hundred heads, an offspring of Typhon and Echidna. In some depictions, were it not for the apples and the presence of the young Hesperides, a viewer could confuse this scene with the hydra of Lerna. This is why the monster is often depicted as a snake. Sometimes, Herakles is shown attacking the monster without the help of the Hesperides. On a fragmentary volute-krater in Malibu\(^ {138}\), Atlas, at the far right, stands holding up the sky, Herakles, naked except for his lionskin, approaches the apple tree of

\(^{133}\) ABV, 392.10 (Museum copyright).
\(^{134}\) Univ. Martin von Wagner Mus., 218, \textit{ABV}, 316.2 (in the Beazley Archive Database, no. 301443).
\(^{136}\) Krannert Art Mus., 70.8.4; \textit{CVA}, Urbana-Champaign, Krannert Art Museum, pl. 22, LIMC, V, pl. 288, s.v. “Hesperides” 7.
\(^{137}\) As in literature: see Apollod., 1.3.51; 2.9.10–11; Paus. 2.13.8; 6.18.4.
the Hesperides. A many-headed snake guards it. Herakles approaches from the left, wielding his club with his left hand and is getting ready to pluck the apple with the right. On a chous in London (fig. 24)\(^{139}\), a satyr, identifiable from his horse tail and ears, his snub nose and scruffy hair and beard, approaches a snake coiled around the trunk of a tree. The satyr wields a club in his right hand and bears a hunter’s or a hero’s chlamys across his left arm and shoulder. The reference to the Hesperides and Herakles is clear from the details of the club, the snake, the tree, and its fruit. To see a satyr in a heroic posture, mimicking Herakles’ actions is comical enough, but the painter has altered yet another detail so as to underline his parody. As satyrs are always gluttons, and apples, golden or otherwise, would not interest them, the painter has drawn wine jugs in place of the expected apples.

The dynamics of parody operate here in two distinct directions: Herakles is mocked but so is the satyr. Visual parody is a game and, as such, does not harm its original and serious model. When satyrs are substituted for heroes or gods, the latter are not really the objects of fun. Rather it is the satyr who is ridiculed. Moreover, to parody a model is to pay homage to it. While it is always a certain temptation to seek explanations in literature which could unravel the oddity of certain pictures, such pictures can be explained satisfactorily more often than not through parody, through comparison with other pictures. Satyrs seem to have been the painters’ prime and preferred choice in parody and other kinds of humour. The centrality of the satyr in this context is not so difficult to comprehend. As farcical mythological characters, satyrs do things that men cannot do. As iconographical figures they play with pictures, but, being almost human, they also resemble men in many ways and act out men’s fantasies. On the other hand, they must endure the many foibles they have been given, such as boast-

\(^{139}\) ARV\(^{2}\), 776. 2 (Courtesy of the British Museum).
fulness and cowardice. Men laugh at them rather than laugh with them. They are used in the parody of the Pelas to debase much human activity, but at the same time they do not really disturb the social order.

Students of ancient Athens have long known that the Greeks were humorous in literature, but the diversity of humour in Athenian vase-painting is equally impressive. Even if it seems that some painters, in Athens, were more prone to depict humour than others (the Nikosthenes Painter, the Nikoxenos Painter, the Brygos Painter, the Geras Painter, etc.) and that there are more comic pictures in red-figure than in black-figure, in fact humour was widespread and is found on most shapes of Athenian vases, in black- and in red-figure. When one encounters irregularities or eccentricities in vase-paintings, rather than turning for an explanation to literary evidence, it is crucial to rely on visual interpretation as one’s first resource. They may need to be understood as humorous pictures. Vase-painting is made of complex visual codes and these incongruous, surprising and often comical pictures can only be properly understood through comparison to and contrast with the more “usual” pictures. One must be prepared to set aside preconceptions and biases about ancient art and accept the possibility that a vase-painter in antiquity was capable of making a joke in his work! Once this “fact” is accepted, it is only a small step to obtaining a simple, elegant and satisfactory solution to the interpretation of a large number of pictures. In this light, many such pictures will need to be reassessed and reinterpreted. While satyr plays can broaden our knowledge of satyrs and their uses in the Greek psyche, they are not useful to explain the presence of satyrs in unusual scenes in vase-paintings. The humour in these vases can be compared to the humour of the theatre only in so far as they use the same “types” of mechanisms of humour. Satyrs were used by painters as an excuse for iconographical play. This is especially true in visual puns, where the objects of ridicule are none other than the rules and codes of imagery themselves. Laughter is a moment of rupture with the seriousness of everyday life’s expectations, occupations and thoughts. Most of the vases discussed in this paper were produced in Athens and their pictures are understandable only with reference to Athenian vase-painting and Athenian culture and life in its broadest sense. We may venture to say that the Potters quarter in Athens must have been at times a very enjoyable workplace.