

ANA RITA FIGUEIRA

A STUDY ON *KAIROS*  
 EXEKIAS'S AMPHORA DEPICTING ACHILLES  
 SLAYING PENTHESILEIA (VI CENT. BC)<sup>1</sup>

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Fig. 1a & Fig. 1b Attic amphora, black figure. Achilles and Penthesileia (a); Dionysos and Enopion (b). Exekias. C. 540 BC. From Vulci (London, British Museum 1836, 224.127) © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

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### 1. Touching *καῖρός*. For an introduction

The figuration of *καῖρός* in antiquity is generally associated with the Statue of Lysippos.<sup>2</sup> This ancient extant pictorial representation of such fleeting notion of time encompasses a combination of meanings, all converging with the generally known sense of grasping an opportunity and the desire to seize an occasion rapidly in order to obtain some benefit [Figueira, forthcoming]. On the other hand, although *καῖρός* has been the object of several studies exploring a plethora of written sources, ranging from Homer at least to Poseidippus [Moutsopoulos 2006, 2005, 1991, 1989, 1962; Trédé, 1992; Pigeaud 2006], few have studied texts and figurations in combination thus considering alternative ways of referring to *καῖρός* to indicate a consistent and coordinated body-mind tool for thinking of the human being [Figueira 2020]. In this regard, much remains to be explored in relation to such figurations that could be relevant to the conceptual framework of *καῖρός* in archaic Greece, which principally concerns the possible universalization of the perception of this time-related notion. Considering this gap in the literature, the present paper offers a reflection on the possibility that archaic Greek vases present an important opportunity to add to the conceptual foundation of *καῖρός*. Following a general presentation of the most salient aspects regarding the status of the figured vase as a discursive tool, this paper focuses on Exekias's depiction of Achilles slaying Penthesileia. The author deems this figuration to constitute a paradigm for the present objective on account of the simplicity conveyed by the depictive content, which transmits clarity to the beholder, notwithstanding the inherent complexity of the composition.

Greek figured vases materialize portable channels of theatricality, rhetoric and communication which surface philosophical exercises [Figueira 2020]. By reshaping myths into scenes holding a connection with daily life situations, circumstances [Boardman 2001] and emotions [Cairns 2021]. Thus, a universal meaning emerges engaging anyone, Greek or non-Greek, with the depiction. The attention of the viewer is captured through an effect of *absorption* [Fried 1988], resulting from an immediate impression revealed at a superficial level [Panofsky 1962]. The

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<sup>2</sup> On *kairos* by Lysippos, also for the figures: Boschung 2013; Latini 2021.

spectator will find ambiguity to be dominant in the pictorial composition. This is mainly due to the strangeness [Fried 1988] caused by the junction of the familiar with the unfamiliar in a rendition that represents a halted movement at the exact instant when to take one path or the other is crucial for what happens next. In this sense, Greek vases depict a fleeting moment which is indetermined because it gives the impression that something no longer is and something else is yet to be. The immediate consequence of this situation is that the beholder experiences *θαῦμα* which generates a sufficient condition to prompt thinking. In this regard, the figurations appear combinatory figurative tools, in that they propound enigmas requiring a combinatorial analysis which leads to new perspectives on existing problems and also foments new discourses and fresh concepts. For these reasons, VI-V BC Greek figured vases emerge multisensory enunciations, in that they encompass a gathering of elements which enfold serious material for hermeneutical accounts. In other words, they shape an *instant prégnant* [Barthes 1973]. Such representations carry a meaning that involves something that comes to light, *φαινόμενον*, and this is independent from what was voluntarily included in the figuration. The *φαινόμενον* also concerns the beholder, in that it adequately names that which comes to the mind suddenly, *ἐξαίφνης*, [Sattler 2019] at the exact moment of confrontation with the figuration. Hereof, the vase figurations shape apperceptions within the sphere of the Greek notion for time under the designation of *καιρός* [Figueira 2020].

In fact, the notion of *καιρός* names a complex perception of time encompassing an ample diversity of sensory allusions belonging to a variety of fields. The history of *καιρός* does not elucidate the meaning of the concept, however it indicates the wide and crucial presence of this notion in three major areas in antiquity, specifically in archaic poetry, in rhetoric and in art. Most of these meanings associate *καιρός* with specific skills an individual must employ correctly at a given moment in order to yield a favourable outcome to the performer of the action. Yet, there are exceptions. For instance, initially, Hippocratic medicine does not associate *καιρός* with a favourable consequence neither for the physician nor for the patient, although it requires from the former rigorous skills which are solely attainable after great effort during a long period of time [Figueira, forthcoming].

In this respect, *καιρός* pertains to the inner apperception of the exact time to act within the chronologic time where mankind moves and acts. Thus, *καιρός* may be experienced as an internal time happening in the chronologic line, although it may be perceived as if the latter would continue to unfold, while the individual experiencing *καιρός* may feel under the impression<sup>3</sup> of being in a distinct space and in a distinct time. As an individual impression, such occurrence causes the impression that chronologic time has stopped. *καιρός* differs, then, from *αἰών*, the perpetually unfolding time of the cycles and of the stars, which encompasses the general nomination of destiny. In fact, the notion of time as a creation of the mind which is also perceived as a space intersection where life may unfold in separate opposite directions, also raises the matter of time perception.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> From which derives the human apprehension of being lonely and alone while that which unfolds continuously appears to be felt everywhere, indifferent to the human presence. Preserved by Hephaestion, Sappho's supposed *Midnight* poem, fr. 168b seems to communicate such apperception, δέδυκε μὲν ἅ σελάννα, καὶ Πληΐαδες· μέσαι δὲ νύκτες, παρὰ δ' ἔρχετ' ὥρα, ἔγω δὲ μόνα κατεύδω, *the moon and the Pleiades have sunk in; It is midnight, the hour unfolds, by myself I lie* (English non-literary translation by the author). In view of this, Sappho's poem might be one of the first Greek poetic equations that give the impression of the relativity of concurrent motion, even though it describes a known cosmic object. In other words, the *Midnight* poem suggests the apperception of the beholder as being relative to their settings. This brightens a thread of coherence akin to the theory of relativity developed by Albert Einstein, which remains influential to physics today. This discussion is excursive to the objective of the present paper, which consists of calling attention to the possibilities offered by archaic Greek vase painting to the conceptual σχῆμα of the notion *καιρός*. However, the author deemed important to observe the consistency ensuing from the *Midnight* poem on the general notion of relativity. Similarly, the underlying understanding of the German physicist respecting relativity as *Gedankenexperiment*, a thinking experiment, is also evoked by the poem of Sappho and is otherwise reminiscent of the method used by vase painters. This is further suggested by the inscriptions of potters and painters who sign their names followed by the word 'ἐποίησε'. Such practice thus conveys the notion that a place was previously thought of for each element in the composition [Figueira 2017b]. The author would like to express gratitude to Laurence Hemming for mentioning Sappho's poem in a *Heidegger and Classical Thought Reading Group* session. By returning to the poem the author was able to observe the above-mentioned coherence.

<sup>4</sup> The impression of the relativity of time and space was discussed in terms of

Given the general association of *καιρός* with the opportune occasion to obtain a favourable effect, *καιρός* seems to designate one of the most anguishing problems that confront the human being with exactitude. Specifically, it names the ability to recognize such occasion and act timely in order to obtain the most beneficial outcome for the person capable of seizing such moment and who is also capable of acting adequately.

Symptomatically, *καιρός* has prompted many studies which offer various perspectives. For instance, a historical perspective is significant not because it decides on the meaning of the word, but rather, because it observes a variety of meanings within the chronological timeline.

In her substantial study entitled *Kairos. L'à-propos et l'occasion: Le mot et la notion, d'Homère à la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C.*, Monique Trédé [1992] discloses a rich etymological and semantic history of the word *καιρός*. This does not lead to undisputable results, but presents instead, and even more productively, influential data leading to the identification of salient patterns and fluxes discussed by ancient philosophers [Mourelatos 1974]. For instance, it reveals that all meanings and etymologies are relatable to a proportion, a *συμμετρία* [Périllie 2005; Pigeaud 1995; 2012]. A crucial notion in ancient philosophy [Kahn 1979; Kirk *et al.* 1983], *συμμετρία* accounts for the exact portion which enables the efficiency of the human action. Differently, Evaghélos Moutsopoulos makes the important distinction between *kairosthesis* (*καιρός, θέσις*) and *kairoskopia* (*καιροσκοπέω*) [1962] for referring the forging *καιρός* to the obtention of illegal benefits focuses. He picks up the aesthetic threads of such examination ensuing from Plato and elaborates on the sense of participation in an emotional universe by observing the association between Eros and Kairos as *é-motion* and *com-motion* [1989]. In later works [1991], Moutsopoulos expands this interpretation by understanding *καιρός* as a space and multidimensional continuity where disruptions appear. As such, the present time is conceived as a fusion of past and future, thus totally engaging *καιρός* in the dyad *ἐρος-θάνατος*. His philosophical approach gives salience to the overlaying of *καιρός* in the problematic of being and identifies a further bond

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possibilities respecting *καιρός*, in the description of the making of the shield of Achilles (*Il. XVIII, 467-617*) [Figueira 2018].

with the conception of justice in Plato. As it is, *καιρός* seems to exist between the subjection to imperativeness and some degree of beginning in freedom [2001]. Moutsopoulos pursues the investigation on these subjects in art and history today [2005], showing a preoccupation with the present-day notion of conscience. More significant for the present paper is the decisive interconnection between the notion of *καιρός* and that of *κρίσις* [1991; 2005, 324-341, 342-348], which forms a chain of coherence with the remarks made by Pigeaud [2006] regarding medical contexts. Indeed, according to the French scholar, both notions, *καιρός* and *κρίσις*, stem from the Hippocratic *corpus*, thus accounting for the confluence of circumstances which demand for the capacity of forming immediate judgement and instantaneous action. In other words, the timely response to the aggregation of appearances, as mentioned above.

By cojoining the notion of *καιρός* and that of *κρίσις*, and by examining both within psychiatry, Pigeaud notices the imbrication of the former and of the latter in human biology and finds that although *καιρός* surfaces a subjective temporal perception, the conjunctures that prompt the occurrence and the occurrence itself are neither voluntarily formed by the patient nor are they determined by the sufferer. Notwithstanding, such conjunctures emerge in and through this person, often not without carrying out a spectacle.

Hence, the immediate impact of analysing early medical narratives can be observed in two major avenues pertaining to the conceptual framework of *καιρός*. One rises from the requirement of the technical competence of the physician and the other from within the body itself. For these reasons, *καιρός* seems to belong to that which composes the *kosmos* and to the human being who also is part of it, as a creature that was born in it, similarly to other existing constituents of the universe, such as non-human animals, plants, minerals and constellations.

However, *καιρός* is commonly associated to the capability of seizing a favourable opportunity. This indicates the skill to grasp a decisive moment and to act in a timely manner, for self-benefit or, in the case of the physician, for the benefit of the patient, despite the fact that regardless of such skill, the beneficial outcome is not secured. The latter situation emerges a threefold problem involving *καιρός*. The first is the notion of an ever-unfolding continuity, the second implies

indifference to individual or collective designs and competence. The third communicates the feeling that the good outcome belongs to the sphere of the harmonic arrangement. Phrased otherwise, it transmits the impression that the effectiveness of the action being performed by the human occurs because they managed to incorporate their action in that which is continuously poured out.

To sum up, Greek figured vases may help define new methodologies leading to subtleties of *καιρός* which could be vital for expanding current knowledge on *καιρός*. Indeed, a major contribution ensuing from the above-mentioned studies regards how consequential action may be when certain circumstances gather simultaneously. Such particular contexts surpass the individual and have repercussions on mankind. For this reason, *καιρός* surfaces thinking how a *πόλις* could be formed. In this respect, Greek figured vases enunciate pictorial problems which ask about the play between lucidity and adjustment. By demanding knowledge coordination from the beholder, intuition and deductive methods are consequential to the notion of *καιρός*.

Indeed, the amphora by Exekias depicting Achilles slaying Penthesileia (Fig. 1a) proves this to be so. In my reflection, I will be handling data, notions and ideas borrowed from existing discussions respecting this figuration [Figueira 2018] and I will be employing this input to further explore the conception of *καιρός* and, principally, in order to emphasize the advance deriving from a hermeneutical exercise prompted by depictive content. Attention will be paid to precepts stemming from influential disciplines respecting ways of figuring out a depiction. The importance of such procedure rises from the revelation of perspectives, meanings and associations that would remain unnoticed should the analysis be restricted to one discipline.

Such is the background against which the notion of *καιρός* surfaces a metaphysical, temporal and subjective perception which designates the exact fraction of time when the convergence of certain circumstances requires a change. Accordingly, the human action may veer to one of the possible directions. The consequences deriving from intervening in such schema where elements gather shape the perception of time and space and determine a decisive outcome. The figuration of Achilles slaying Penthesileia suggested that the apprehension of *καιρός*



happens suddenly. However, it results from a sequence of non-linear rhythmic oppositions that occur in a relation of simultaneity in the same space and time, independently from human determination, as the allusion to the duel between Achilles and Penthesileia implies. This is particularly so if it is regarded in the light of the fighting exercise at the γυμνάσιον. Such sense is circulated by the homology with the moment when Achilles falls in love with the queen of the Amazons. The English language helps to elucidate a further extension of this metaphor. The figuration also implies that *καῖρός* fills in a void and that this filling in also is a falling in the exact position from which meaning emerges as a result of an incorporation in the ever-unfolding chain of simultaneous gatherings. Indeed, the expression ‘fall in love’ conveys the meaning of being overthrown. This suggests that a place is left vacant and another vacant place is now occupied as a consequence of the ‘fall’. This lexical unit also encompasses the meaning of abandonment and of letting go. A fall generally is not voluntary. Then, the sense of the expression communicates a drop at an intersection, as much as it builds on the notion of *θαῦμα*, of fear, and of otherness, all of which are incorporated in the expression ‘falling in love’, which, consequently, forms a metaphor.

Deriving from the precedent background, the metaphor in the figuration by Exekias communicates *καῖρός* through a halted action that transmits the impression of time being suspended, while the spirals around the hero and the amazon suggest a further dimension of time. This may be understood as continuity happening in simultaneity with the referred impression of suspension. The image becomes more complex as Dionysos and presences of the universe of the god (Fig. 1b) reappear in the garments of Penthesileia.

Dionysos and Dionysian representations strongly evoke the completion of a cycle of nature, while alluding to disorder, to disruption and to all aspects pertaining to otherness and alterity [Figueira 2020]. These reveal the vagabond god [Jeanmaire 1970] as an orderly deity and, by extension, also evoke the reasoning and the emotion underlying the *kosmos*. Thus, the pictorial composition by Exekias highlights a powerful, yet straightforward, rendition of time, space and all that lives and makes live in and within the *kosmos*, including the human being.

Thus, Exekias formulates a pictorial σχῆμα of *καῖρός* by using



a widely known and disseminated love story, principally because Penthesileia reflects a perfect conception of the stranger, the ξήνος, hence the non-Greek, thus echoing the Persian wars. In this way, Exekias shapes the universalisation of *καῖρός* regardless of the level of meaning the beholder is capable of and independently from the ideas the painter might have held. The important point I would like to stress is not what the figuration might have meant, but rather, what it contains that may matter to *καῖρός*. The effectiveness of the composition relies, then, on the universality of the theme, which is the experience of the emotion called love. Therefore, it could be further claimed that Exekias innovates, since his reinvention indicates that *καῖρός* is not exclusively the matter of the physician, of the rhetorician nor of the farmer and of the officer in command of the troops.<sup>5</sup> Instead, *καῖρός* is as much the matter of the technician as it is the matter of the individual and of the way of the *kosmos* as such. The reinvention of Exekias of Achilles slaying Penthesileia indicates *καῖρός* as a central problem to the human being. Exekias puts across the impression of a creature subdued to the process of becoming in which individual action is decisive, although the circumstances that initiate the process do not depend entirely on the individual, as the fall in love implies. The evolving interrogation cojoins the moment in which the hero kills the amazon and simultaneously falls in love with her.

Consequently, the author argues that this specific instant develops a pictorial homology of the adverb ἐξαίφνης while it also suggests the role of emotion in human action. Specifically, the emotion of θαῦμα. The halted posture of Achilles mainly refers to the wonder that propels thinking and might lead to that which is named under the general designation of knowledge. For this reason, the figuration shapes a strong allusion to how the myth of Achilles may cojoin human thinking to the energies flowing and opposing within the *kosmos* and how they may intertwine and possibly be attuned to each other. In view of these considerations, θαῦμα propels motion, causes becoming and establishes a relation of homology with the *kosmos*. Such effect is further emphasised by the spiral connecting side A to side B. Thus, the continuous motion of the

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pigeaud 2006, 31.

vase is implicit, accentuating a prominent notion in ancient thinking [Sattler 2020].

Such sense is repeated on side B. Here Dionysos is represented with vine branches and his son, Enopion. The human shapes define a thread of meaning linked to the succession of the seasons, signalling time as distension. This subtle motion is then paired to things undergoing processes of maturation, including the sufficient conditions allowing them to come into being. At this point, the above-mentioned notion of κρίσις meets a challenge. Is κρίσις indisputably related to a disturbing spectacle? Is it always connected with the impression of suddenness as far as circumstances are concerned? Is it interdependent of cosmic motions [Hirai 2014, 269]? Exekias apparently weaves all these perspectives together.<sup>6</sup> A spectacle is suggested yet is not necessarily horrid. The act of killing the amazon certainly transmits the impression of a terrible spectacle but it also evokes the emergence of love, in which case a spectacle arises though it does not have to be horrid.

As to the second interrogation, the impression of suddenness generates a sufficient condition; however, the vine allusion indicates an ongoing process. That the articulation of both conveys the impression of suddenness remains solely an impression. Regarding the third question, side A of the amphora seems to respond affirmatively to the cosmic interdependence.

The monumental black shape of Achilles is opposed to the smaller body and lighter complexion<sup>7</sup> of Penthesileia. This notifies a parallel plane mirroring a symmetrical projection. The human shapes are prominent on the surface of the vase in a way that highlights a strong opposition between light and dark and communicates an interplay between depth and surface, motion and stillness. In fact, such geometric and chromatic qualities distribute the human shapes against the redness

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<sup>6</sup> The above-mentioned *Midnight* poem by Sappho conveys the impression that circumstances gather causing a phenomenon to become visible while the perceiver remains still. In this regard, it suggests καιρός and indicates κρίσις as a gathering that generates a spectacle in which the human does not participate as a medium and which is unrelated to the horrid.

<sup>7</sup> Although white is a vase painting convention to indicate women.

of the clay, transmitting the impression that the hero and the amazon stand immobilized.

On the contrary, the spirals inscribed on the clear surface around them strongly suggest motion. All these elements make coherence as figurations of time as a twofold convergence of disparate planes. One such plane cues an ever emergent (re)flowing motion, which is signalled by the spirals. The other plane warns a quantity of time for the elements to gather simultaneously, causing change exclusively to humans. This time accident (*accido, acciduus*), as suggested by the figuration, consists of the eruption of meaning which configures an immobilisation rendered by curved lines stemming out of an axis. The rotation prompted by this form generates a whorled pattern, which admits a clockwise or counterclockwise motion.

## *2. The amphora by Exekias (Achilles and Penthesileia, Dionysos and Enopion) and καίρός*

In this wise, the state of being aware that certain circumstances have gathered that will cause something decisive to happen is perceived by the human being as simultaneous sudden occurrences. This is independent from the determination and thinking mind of the individual. For instance, the emergence of a flower or a tree might be perceived as having happened ‘suddenly’, similarly to the eruption of an extreme emotion or a feeling. καίρός pertains to such state of affairs.

Returning to Exekias, one such apperception is conveyed by the exact instant when Achilles falls in love with Penthesileia. The allusion to a generally well-known love story embodies the emergence of authenticity, generating a powerful pictorial metaphor in a way that makes it comprehensible for the observer to recognize the subject and to engage with this universal human experience. However, universality performs the function of absorbing the attention of the viewer to stimulate thinking. The fact that such moment fundamentally builds upon oppositions, such as masculinity-femininity, dark-light, human-animal, motion-immobility, human-divine, oneness-otherness, linearity-circularity, flags the process of becoming in articulation with καίρός.

Thus, by refreshing the myth, this pictorial composition unfolds

and explores extant meanings in a general way that excludes the sense of opportunity associated to the obtention of unilateral benefits. The only emerging sense associated with a benefit would reside in the effort of bringing something into existence. This sense is implicit in the metaphor of the battle and in the wine context on side B.

To sum up, the composition is notoriously ambiguous. Everything presented is undetermined, incomplete and incongruent, though it appears otherwise. The observer is expected to create a complete rendition of the gaps in the figuration by thinking of it. This isolates the pictorial composition as a thinking exercise, an intellectual *ἄσκησις*. In this regard, it configures a tool for intellectual growth. The substance of the pictorial content seems to rise from the suggestion of a direct response to the presence of the queen of the Amazons.

Indeed, the figuration offers many perspectives. One of which suggests the continuity which enfolds instantiations of *καιρός*. These invariably are independent from a favourable effect and look at authenticity. Eventually, a metaphorical expression implies that specific distinctive human capacities are being called. It signals the fundamental strategy for communicating authenticity, beyond the referential. As such, metaphor gives rise to intellectual exercises on ineffable affections.<sup>8</sup> By manifesting a point on how they might appear, they further engender a similar process, akin to *statements* [Robinson 1987].

Heraclitus's phrasing constitutes one such example of synthetic and rigorous, if complex, renditions. Nonetheless, the linguistic string encompasses ambiguity and indeterminacy, which occur in a semantic field that looks into clues for possible meanings, within a circumscription. Depictions, as verbal metaphors, continuously prompt reappearances, suggesting the sudden emergence<sup>9</sup> of *ἀλήθεια*,

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<sup>8</sup> Intuition designates a kind of knowledge which is independent of the use of logic and rational thinking. It further nominates something that cannot be associated with an exact measure of time, for instance, past, present or future. Regardless of its elusive quality, intuition concerns something yet to happen, in which case it implies syntonisation with the external world being. On the other hand, an impression, as such, may function as a product of memory, regardless of imprecision or indistinctiveness. On the contrary, it may translate a particular effect associated with a feeling, a sense or with the mind. 'Impression' also names an affecting sight and an imitation.

<sup>9</sup> Specifically, *φύσις* is clarity that comes to mind. However, for my argument, I

authenticity. Thus, the re-presented process gets enacted. Heraclitus's fragment 123, φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ, *that which appears into light loves*<sup>10</sup> *to be masked/self-enfolding*,<sup>11</sup> seems to conform to the amphora by Exekias. The expression 'falling in love', ensuing from the love story evoked by Fig. 1a, carries a similar meaning to the one being conveyed by fragment 123 of Heraclitus. Because oppositions and dissimilarities are fundamental in ancient philosophy [Sattler 2019a], they become especially consequential in the composition by Exekias. Here, they raise the conceptual framework of *phainomena*, e.g., the spontaneous revelation of all that appears involuntarily into the light. As mentioned above, spirals signal perpetual motion, while Dionysos extends the human and cosmological proportion to cycles in nature, enfolding all in one. This demonstrates a translation of emergence and resurgence into lines and colour and demonstrates a homology with the fragment of Heraclitus.

Indeed, may φύσις stand for a homology of ἀλήθεια? Are emergence and resurgence translations for these notions? Are they adequate to designate the process of being, or does this not elucidate the fragment of Heraclitus [Dahlstrom 2011, 12]? In what follows, the focus lies on bidirectional insights emerging from the combination of verbal metaphors and figurations. Both give rise to equally valid ways of looking into philosophical problems. Furthermore, by combining both, perspectives open and expand. In this way, I want to ask whether fragment 123 addresses being as a process, a meaning which is salient in the transition lines in the figuration by Exekias. Accordingly, time perception is at the centre. Minimal units such as distension and

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consider also the following meanings: 'origin', 'growth', 'natural form or constitution', 'outward form or appearance', 'nature' in the sense of all things in the *kosmos*, 'constitution, temperament', 'instinct', 'a regular order in nature' [LSJ, 1996; Bailly, 2021; Chantraine, 1999].

<sup>10</sup> Φιλεῖ could be translated as 'associates with', but the middle voice, κρύπτεσθαι would have to be rendered as 'being masked'.

<sup>11</sup> Κρύπτεσθαι is typically translated as 'self-concealing' or 'hiding', however, context being crucial, I am associating it with φύσις in which case it is suggested that 'enfold' transmits the way many processes occur in nature, for instance new leaves emerging in a plant. In other words, it designates the process taking place through layers which unfold from enfolding.

instantaneity, ‘suddenness’ and ‘unexpectedness’, ἐξαίφνης develop in the conceptual context pertaining to the eruption of clarity, as a result of gradations from motion to metabolism or stillness. One of these grades would be a situation in between, a fundamental problem in ancient philosophy [Sattler 2019]. If this is so, then it also pertains to *καῖρός*.

The choice of the moment to compose raises principally the crucial problem of rendering an impression of exactitude that includes ambiguity. This means that the meaningfulness of the pictorial moment is totally reliant on the capacity to evoke something that belongs to the common knowledge but simultaneously challenges universality. This happens through the incorporation of disruptive elements that allow the the sense of the constitution of time as continuity [Sattler 2019b]. The underlying matter progresses from the interplay between assumptions and presumptions about time. Method, understood as a path of enquiry, presupposes the adequate identification of the fundamentals of the object of enquire. The effectiveness of the method is, then, entirely reliant on the exact notion of that which is being investigated and, equally important, it also entrusts the exact direction of the method toward the heart of that which is being enquired.

Specifically, the method that investigates the shaping and organization of a particular presence that reveals itself through impressions is presumably better suited to account for the kind of thinking that manifests specific interpretative difficulties, namely metaphorical thinking. Drawing and painting consist of modes of expression prompting sensorial awareness. The senses constituted the ancient philosopher’s primary source for knowing and verbalizing his findings. However, the object of enquiry being mankind, impressions are consequential. The thinker must master the competence to reinvent these impressions which are embodied in myths. The beholder will then be able to develop a combinatory analysis. Should this be so, *καῖρός* pertains to a moment of suspension, for rethinking human matters. The beholder will translate the impressions into discourse, which means that «the discourse does not correct intuitions; it generalizes them; it creates new immediate relations» [Almeida 2022, 48].<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The English translations of Almeida [2022] are the author’s responsibility.

Many drawings are forthright manifestations of the intuitive response to a sudden fleeting thought, observation or felt experience, whereas others reveal a slow, deliberate and maturing reshaping, where the mind is dominant. The composition by Exekias adverts the latter, independently of the heavy black shape of Achilles, which defines a loud opposition against the whiteness of skin of the falling amazon. Therefore, fragility appears as a main point, although this is a convention used to denote women. On the contrary, Penthesileia unfolds the nature and the wild, the untamed. The skin of the leopard fastens at her waist, descending from her torso down to her thighs. It adheres to the body communicating the impression of duality, further enhanced by the hissing serpent topping her helmet. Such marks of untamedness are obliterated by the fatal wound inflicted by the sharp point of the spear of Achilles, as indicated by the splashes of red ink, signalling blood. This is significant because Penthesileia is being killed like a wild animal, in that she gets caught by surprise, θαῦμα, as she turns to defend herself but meets her death instead. Significantly, the opposite side of the vase depicts Dionysos and his son Enopion performing a ritual. Spirals connect both sides, indicating the expansion of the manifold faces of being through the processes of enfolding and unfolding. Meaning is represented as an instant of clarity, φύσις, which meets a relation of homology in the representation of Dionysos. As such, the figuration that served the purpose of rendering a discourse on καίρος also confronted the beholder with the impossibility of representing the unrepresentable. Possibly, the latter remains accessible solely through a constructive process which is «similar to the faith in the demonstration». This being so, the figuration by Exekias comprises this sense as well. For these reasons, the theme of Achilles slaying Penthesileia by Exekias materializes the everlasting possibility of confirmation. «It is the permanent possibility of confirming that brings the strength of prove; it is one of the highest forms of self-conscience» [Almeida, 2022, 48].



### 3. *Final remarks*

It is evident that rigid boundaries between the creations of human thinking are infrequent. In the following, the examination of the pictorial data shows a far-reaching method capable of challenging existing interpretative approaches and of filling in contexts. This enables the definition of a methodology that seeks worthwhile aspects of existing approaches, envisioning complementarity and ever-renewed revisions aiming at thinking and feeling.

The amphora by Exekias reveals VI BC Greek pottery to be a fundamental tool for thinking. Achilles slaying Penthesileia gives rise to a meaningful horizon capable by itself of communicating the sufficient features for rethinking *καῖρός*. As a mechanism for thinking, the figurations mainly exhibit expressions of visual imagination and manifest spatial reasoning. These two traits indicate *καῖρός* as a motion in space, not solely as a matter of time.

The second point acknowledges the function of metaphor as an effective and immediate operative strategy for communicating authenticity. Thus, by turning away from the superficial understanding of metaphor as an obscure expression that obnubilates phenomena rather than making them explicit, circumstances to think of appears, signalling what it is, through what becomes visible or is declared. Looking at a metaphorical expression in articulation with depictions makes it possible to identify the homology rising from such combination. As such, the pictorial metaphor highlights the process of conversing impressions into compositions carrying universal meaning, one which can form new relations and reframe existing perspectives. By embodying the process of becoming, the contribution Exekias makes to the understanding of *καῖρός* regardless of the goal, is huge. It discloses authenticity; specifically, it shapes what lies beyond the mere opportunity, free from any design of the mind. Exekias frames *καῖρός* within the ongoing exercise of concurrence into harmony.

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### Keywords:

*kairos*; Achilles; Penthesileia; Greek vases

## Abstract

Even though many specialized studies have contributed to the conceptual framework of *kairos*, there has been very little research dealing with this notion in ancient arts. Observing this gap, principally in what concerns Greek pottery, the author explores Exekias's pictorial rendition of Achilles slaying Penthesileia in a black figure *amphora* dating from VI BC, in order to draw attention to the hermeneutical possibilities arising from a comparatist approach interested in the interaction between words and images. Specifically, the author proposes that vase figurations contribute to rethink *kairos*, principally in what concerns the chain of meaning generated by the association of pictorial materials and ancient philosophy, including key-terms from early Hippocratic medicine, such as that of *krisis*.

Ana Rita Figueira  
School of Arts and Humanities  
Centre for Classical Studies, University of Lisbon, Portugal  
E-mail: [anaritafigueira@campus.ul.pt](mailto:anaritafigueira@campus.ul.pt)