Classical Quarterly 61.2 394–401 (2011) Printed in Great Britain
doi:10.1017/S0009838811000243

AJAX AND ACHILLES PLAYING A BOARD GAME: REVISITED FROM THE LITERARY TRADITION*

According to the detailed surveys carried out by a large number of archaeologists and scholars, there are more than 150 vases depicting the well-known image of Ajax and Achilles playing a board game.[1] These vases have been dated to the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. Interestingly enough, in some cases the two warriors are explicitly identified as Ajax and Achilles on the basis of inscriptions.[2] Sometimes even the number of their throws on the game board is also labelled.[3] Furthermore, many of the pieces of pottery adorned with this motif show formulaically[4] the presence of the goddess Athena. This goddess is depicted facing the viewer and standing between the players, holding her spear in one hand while making a gesture as if speaking with the other one, and looking rather sternly at Achilles.[5] However, the meaning both of her gesture in particular and that of the picture in general still

* I wish to express my gratitude to Fátima Silva and Oliver Taplin, who read an earlier draft of this article and encouraged me with illuminating support and critical advice. Javier Campos was a source of inspiration for many of the ideas expressed here. I am particularly grateful to an anonymous referee, whose observations and comments have led to substantial improvements in the final version. Finally, my special thanks to John Wilkins for his accurate revision. Any remaining inaccuracies are my sole responsibility.

[1] H. Mommsen, 'Achill und Aias pflichtvergessen?', in H.A. Cahn and E. Simon (edd.), *Tainia: Festschrift für R. Hampe* (Mainz, 1980), 139–52, registers 155 vases with the two players (Achilles and Ajax) dicing. Among the extensive research and documentation on this subject, see also S. Woodford, 'Ajax and Achilles playing a game on an olpe in Oxford', *JHS* 102 (1982), 173–85; eadem, *The Trojan War in Ancient Art* (Ithaca, NY, 1993), 59; and A. Alvar Nuño, '*ΑΝΕΡΡΙΦΘΩ ΚΥΒΟΣ*: Áyax y Aquiles tiran los dados', *MHNH* 6 (2006), 15–32.

[2] In the catalogue of A. Kossatz-Deissmann in *LIMC* 1.1 (1981), s.v. Achilleus, 96–102, these vases correspond to numbers 393 and 394 (with Achilles at the right side), 397 (in addition to two fragmentary vases in Leipzig catalogued as T 355 and T 391), 400, 403, 406, 408, 422 and 427. Ajax and Achilles are the names almost exclusively assigned to the players in the entire repertory of the vases with this figure decoration, which leads us to the conclusion that whenever the two players appear they represent these two famous heroes. Kossatz-Deissmann, 102, notes that there is, perhaps, only one exception to this rule, in a vase by the Amasis Painter, where two board-game players are named as Oneiroi. For the Boston amphora and the variations of the scene on both of its sides, see H. Mommsen (n. 1), 142 and 147, and A. Steiner, *Reading Greek Vases* (Cambridge, 2007), 35.

[3] According to Woodford 1982 (n. 1), 185 (Appendix II), 4 out of the 138 vases and fragments collected in her list (Appendix I) have inscriptions of the numbers called. These vases correspond to F 1 (= 397 Kossatz-Deissmann); C 21 (= 403 Kossatz-Deissmann); D 48 (= 418 Kossatz-Deissmann) and F 10 (not included in Kossatz-Deissmann).

[4] My analysis draws on the categories of 'motif' and 'formula' developed by S. Woodford, *Images of Myth in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2003), Part 3, ch. 5. For 'formula' see also A. Steiner (n. 2) 5.

[5] The goddess is also depicted with helmet, shield and even aegis in some of the vases. For the main variants of this 'enormously popular' type, see Woodford 1982 (n. 1), 174–5 and 181–4 (Appendix I, especially groups C and D) and Kossatz-Deissmann (n. 2), 98–9. To sum up, the presence of the goddess Athena is attested in at least 72 out of the 138 vases and fragments registered by Woodford.

remains a conundrum,[6] despite the fact that a considerable number of *prima facie* plausible hypotheses have been put forward over the last two centuries.[7]

Apparently the simplest explanation for the board-game players' scene was suggested by W.R. Halliday in 1913, who concluded that 'The figures may even represent merely warriors engaged in a pastime'.[8] As a matter of fact, this seems to be the most plausible interpretation. The warriors are in most cases lightly armed and hold their spears loosely, the rest of their weapons (shields and, sometimes, even helmets) lying apart behind them. Nevertheless, in long frieze decorations from bigger pieces of pottery, the players are portrayed as engrossed in the game they are playing, while completely indifferent to the battle that their fellow warriors are actually fighting on both sides of them.

Exekias is assumed to be the first artist who depicted the motif of the two heroes playing a board game.[9] Woodford connected the scene of these heroes at leisure with the picture on the other side of the Exekias amphora, where the twin heroes Castor and Polydeuces are depicted in leisure time too; that is, in 'moments when they are not being particularly heroic'. The depiction of heroes when off-duty on both sides of the pottery could be interpreted along the following lines: the artist would be interested in portraying what seems to be absent from any known literary version of the mythical stories about these heroes. The impossibility of linking the images to any literary influence would support the contention of the originality of the artist, as well as the lack of any connection between the depiction in question and any literary source.[10] However, as Woodford acknowledges, the success of the

[6] Goldhill and Osborne consider the image of these two players to be an emblem of 'the uncompleted game of reading'. They programmatically point to the characteristic polysemy of ancient Greek myth and, therefore, of all forms of ancient art (verbal and non-verbal) that draw on myth, in both their form and their content. See S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (edd.), *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture* (Cambridge, 1994), 6.

[7] T.H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece: A Handbook* (London, 1991), 200. One of the main strands of interpretation of this motif is to be found in religion. The depiction of the two soldiers engrossed in the board game with the presence of the goddess Athena is held to represent a scene of ritual divination before fighting. The players would be dicing in order to guess whether the battle would be won or not, as the goddess would let them know by the signs of her head and hands. Besides this cleromantic interpretation, a different proposal has been put forward based on realism. The scene would then just have to do with the quotidian, i.e. with an imaginative reconstruction of daily life in the Greek camp during the siege of Troy, thus not necessarily being inspired by a lost (and unknown) literary epic poem. The goddess would favour Achilles to win the game, notwithstanding the battle. A third interpretation is related to politics, and it would point to an anti-tyrannical mood. The scene of the greatest heroes caught off guard would draw on a mythical allegory of a historical fact in Athens: Peisistratus' return to Attica in 546, as told by Hdt. 1. 62–3. The depiction of the two players would thus serve the double function of comforting the Athenians for their weakness akin to that of Ajax and Achilles, while at the same time warning 'that, in the face of tyranny and defeat, survival lies with the alert'. The most recent names linked to these three main hermeneutic strands are Alvar Nuño (n. 1); Woodford (n. 1) and J. Boardman, 'Exekias', *AJA* 82 (1978), 11–25, respectively, to whose most sensitive publications on this subject I am greatly indebted.

[8] W.R. Halliday, *Greek Divination: A Study of its Methods and Principles* (London, 1913), 207–8.

[9] See J. Boardman (n. 7), 18; Woodford 1982 (n. 1), 173–4, n. 6. Following Mommsen, Kossatz-Deissmann (n. 2), 102, points, nevertheless, to a singular cup (398 Kossatz-Deissmann), more ancient than Exekias' vase and independent of his influence, which could date from 540 B.C.E.

[10] Woodford 1982 (n. 1), 179; eadem (n. 4), 118–19. J. Boardman (n. 7), 24, also relates the scene of the Dioskouroi to that of Ajax and Achilles within his allegorical interpretation of a

Ajax and Achilles picture has nothing to do with the uniqueness of the picture on the other side of the amphora, which 'never became popular with other artists, unlike the scene with Ajax and Achilles'.[11]

Bigger vases allow for a more elaborated version of the motif. The two players are occasionally flanked by warriors in the strife of battle.[12] The question still remains as to how these additional figures are related to the central scene of the heroes playing a board game. When taken together, the whole picture conspicuously reflects a poignant and unexpected situation, as if the heroes were deliberately apart from their fellows and neglecting their military duties. The goddess's presence in the middle of the scene, between the board-game players, can be interpreted as an 'epiphany' at the critical moment, such as the well-known one in *Iliad* 1. This holistic interpretation is contested by Mommsen, who argues for taking the heroes of the central scene apart from the soldiers surrounding them. Accordingly, Athena's function is reduced to merely supporting her favourite, who is indeed going to win. Kossatz-Deisman offers a conciliatory solution: Athena is giving victory to Achilles in order to make him finish the game as soon as possible and have him return to battle.[13]

I am myself also inclined to propose an epic context for the interpretation of the whole scene, albeit a complex one. Specifically, I contend that this epic context does not need to be *a text*, if we mean by that a certain version of some (lost) epic poem where such a scene of dicing would appear, thus providing a specific textual correlate to the image on the vases. I agree that this would certainly be too simplistic a way of relating texts and images. My proposal revolves around a twofold way of stating the epic reference of the scene in question. First, I take into account the 'generic text' that works by means of so-called scenes, such as, for example, 'heroes at leisure'. They are known to any reader of the *Iliad* (cf. *Iliad* 9.182 ff.), as much as the 'epiphanies at the critical moment' scenes (cf. *Iliad* 1.188 ff., 2.123). Nevertheless, these scenes cannot be understood as detached from a tradition of narrative, and this narrative tradition takes us to a more specific epic context.

The recurrent element in all these vases is, in fact, the board game,[14] which in the mythical tradition was an invention of Palamedes,[15] a hero absent from the Homeric poems but important in the epic cycle, especially in the *Cypria*, if not in a *Palamedia*.[16] In the resumé made by Proclus of the *Cypria*, the death of Palamedes is immediately followed by the rage of Achilles and his decision not to fight any more in the war against the Trojans.[17] Because of its brevity, the

political intention on the part of the painter, against tyranny.

[11] Woodford 1982 (n. 1), 179.

[12] Other decorations show sphinxes, maenads, women and men as 'conventional fillers'. See Woodford 1982 (n. 1), 179 and nn. 50–4.

[13] Kossatz-Deissmann (n. 2), 103.

[14] Only a very small number of vases leave out the board. See Woodford 1982 (n. 1), 182–3 (Appendix I: D. 3 and D. 33).

[15] S. fragments 429 and 479 Radt; Gorg. *Pal.* 30; Alcid. *Od.* 22 and 27.

[16] The so called *Palamedia* (*Anecd. Ox.* 1.277–8 Cramer) could be a part of the *Kypria* devoted to Palamedes' excellence. For further details on the *Palamedia* as well as on the question of whether the composer of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* knew about Palamedes or not, the reader is referred to the detailed summary that can be found in R. Falcetto, *Il Palamede di Euripide: Edizione e commento dei frammenti* (Alessandria, 2002), 10–12.

[17] Procl. *Chrest. Ep.* 119–21 Severyns (= *Cypria*, *argumentum* 30ss. Bernabé).

shorthand offered by Proclus draws on some prior knowledge on the part of his readers of the epic poetry that we now lack. As far as the resumé goes, there is no link between Palamedes' death and the rage of Achilles apart from the juxtaposition of the two facts, there being no reference to the cause of Achilles' rage in any way. Although the asyndeton of the narration belongs to the style of the excerptor, who is almost exclusively concerned with stating the bare actions of the poems, without showing any concern for the narrative links that relate the actions to each other, the possibility of a strong connection between Palamedes' death and Achilles' rage none the less remains open.[18]

The causal bond between these two facts is actually explicit in Philostratus' *Heroicus*, where an authorized informant of the Trojan events states that not only Achilles but also Ajax reacted angrily against Palamedes' death by breaking up with the Achaeans and refusing to continue fighting. Philostratus' remarks about the cause of Achilles' (and Ajax's) rage[19] seem to echo the versions of epic, tragedy and the early sophists.[20] If both Ajax and Achilles cut off their participation in the war because of their close friendship with Palamedes and as a protest against his death,[21] the image of both heroes leaning over the board game invented by

[18] The Homeric aetiology of Achilles' rage and dereliction of battle could have coexisted with other possible versions in the *Faktenkanon* of the Trojan tradition. On the multiformity of ancient epic and the coexistence of the 'epic cycle' with the 'Homeric' poems from the Archaic period until the end of the classical period, as well as on their intertextuality and competition, see, among others, J.S. Burgess, *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 2001), esp. 137, where Burgess recalls T. Allen's suggestion 'that the *Cypria* is narrating a variant account on the wrath of Achilles, pre-Homeric in origin, in which the murder of Palamedes is the cause of Achilles' withdrawal'.

[19] Philostr. *Her.* 33.33–6. See also Philostr. *Her.* 25.16, where it is explicitly said that 'the wrath of Achilles did not fall upon the Hellenes because of the daughter of Khrysês, but that Achilles, too, was angry over Palamedes' (translation by J.K. Berenson Maclean and E. Bradshaw Aitken). As far as the *hypothesis* from *PMich.* inv. 3020(a)+2794 (a) [A]+*P.Cairo* inv. ? (= *PMich.* inv. 2787, unpublished) seems to show, it is possible that at the end of Euripides' *Palamedes* the Nereids intervened in some way in the action. The presence of the Nereids is not clear, though Luppe thinks that they saved Eax, Palamedes' brother, from drowning in the sea (W. Luppe, 'Nuove acquisizioni da papiro di Euripide', *SemRom* 3 (2000), 267–79, at 273. The mention of the Nereids could be connected to Palamedes' family, which was linked with the sea as his father Nauplius and his grandfather Poseidon prove. However, the Nereids could also be mentioned in relation to Achilles, as Palamedes' friend and possibly enraged because of his friend's death. Philostratus' *Heroicus* explicitly mentions Euripides' *Palamedes* and recalls some of its verses. Therefore we need not discard the possibility that Euripides had related Achilles' rage to Palamedes' death.

[20] On the dependence of Philostratus on the first sophists, especially on Gorgias as one of his main sources, see F. Mestre, 'Refuting Homer in the *Heroikos* of Philostratus', in E. Bradshaw Aitken and J.K. Berenson Maclean (edd.), *Philostratus's* Heroikos*: Religion and Cultural Identity in the Third Century* C.E. (Atlanta, GA, 2004), 127–41, especially 137–9. In addition, in the tragic tradition, Agamemnon seems to be responsible for, or at least acquiescent in, the unfair death of the wise inventor at the hands of the cunning but envious and vengeful Odysseus. And Achilles seems to be one of Palamedes' best friends as much as Ajax. Similarly, Palamedes' destiny and Ajax's doom look too much alike. They both enter a competition with Odysseus and both heroes die because of him. So it is highly likely that a certain relation between the first rage of Achilles against Agamemnon and the death of the board-game inventor was perceived and, by virtue of this, that vase-painting during the sixth to fourth centuries would echo in its own medium a mythical tradition avoided or ignored by Homer but elaborated by other poets during the sixth, fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.

[21] On the friendship of Palamedes with Achilles during the siege of Troy, see a late Corinthian *pyxis* (Paris, Louvre E 609) with Palamedes, Protesilaus, Nestor, Patroclus and Achilles riding.

Palamedes while their comrades-in-arms keep on fighting against the Trojans would then be an appealing reference to these popular heroes and to their well-known myth.[22] As already advanced at the beginning of this note, some of the vases even show the inscription of the numbers of each player's throws, and Palamedes was recurrently considered to be the inventor of letters and numbers in all literary versions and testimonies.[23]

In keeping with the mythical tradition, the presence of the goddess Athena as a protector of both Achilles and, especially, of Odysseus, but also as an enemy of Ajax and, maybe, of Palamedes himself,[24] can be plausibly linked with the more elaborate formula of the pictorial design in longer frieze decorations.[25] Moreover, the goddess never looks at Ajax but at Achilles,[26] in what seems to be a rather furious or exhortative gesture to prevent Achilles from allying with a victim of his patroness's ploys and to make him join in the war against her most hated enemies, the Trojans.

My contention is, thus, twofold. First of all, I submit that the scenes of Ajax and Achilles playing a board game in the above-mentioned vases are to be interpreted in relation to both generic and specific epic traditions, mainly those of the *Cypria* on the murder of Palamedes and Achilles' wrath. Secondly, I submit that the success of the motif reflects the increasing interest in the hero Palamedes that the intellectual ambience would later on rescue from epic lore and further develop in the new and expanding genres of tragedy and rhetoric. In this way, one comes to understand the strong demand for this specific motif, repeated again and again by the artists to satisfy the clients of the time.[27]

See also S. Woodford in *LIMC* (1994), s.v. Palamedes, 147 and 149. One can confidently assume that Exekias, being originally from Salamis, should be familiar with the legends about Ajax, as can be appreciated in other famous depictions by this painter of the Salaminian hero. See. J.D. Beazley, *Attic Black-figure: A Sketch* (Oxford, 1928), 18–21.

[22] On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that Palamedes' invention of board games was also related to more 'peaceful' events during the siege of Troy. In Aulis, while waiting for the winds to blow, the soldiers spend their time in leisure activities, specifically including the playing of Palamedes' board games (Eur. *IA* 192–205). Moreover, as noticed by Falcetto (n. 16), 9 with notes ad loc., Palamedes 'grazie ai giochi, previene una sedizione, risollevando gli animi dei soldati afflitti per la nostalgia della patria'. In some of the vases under scrutiny here, birds or a palm tree appear in between the players, instead of Athena, perhaps in allusion to, or in a sort of a mingling with, these further events in the story of Palamedes as the board-game inventor. See Woodford 1982 (n. 1), 180.

[23] Other variants (see Woodford 1982 [n. 1], 177) of the motif show musicians instead of warriors playing the board game with their instruments hanging up in a tree, while on other occasions it is Hermes, Dionysus and/or Poseidon who appear. Music and poetry are linked not only with Achilles and how he spent his time during his rage but also with Palamedes himself. Hermes as an inventor is connected with Palamedes too, as well as with Poseidon, Palamades' grandfather, and Dionysus, the god of tragedy.

[24] Cf. J. Svenbro, 'Un suicide théologiquement correct: sur *l'Ajax* de Sophocle', *Études Littéraires* 32–33 (2000–1), 113–27, and L. Romero Mariscal, 'El prólogo del *Palamedes* de Eurípides', *Lexis* 25 (2007), 229–40.

[25] Sometimes the goddess appears together with Hermes, the patron god of inventors, who, as some scholars believe, could have appeared as a *deus ex machina* in Euripides' *Palamedes*. See Falcetto (n. 16), 184, n. 47.

[26] See Woodford 1982 (n. 1), 177, n. 36.

[27] The 'spate of illustration' was another reason argued for 'a fanciful invention by a sculptor or monumental painter'. See T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 1998), 634–5. Two male statues in a marble statuesque group in the Museum of the Acropolis (417 Kossatz-Deissmann) have also been connected

The tragedians fed their imagination 'with the slides of Homer', which by Aeschylus' time could still include the most famous epic poems of the Trojan War, albeit in a traditional way.[28] I concur with Nagy's assumptions that the Panathenaic festivals may well have deployed a bottleneck function of selection within the multiformity of archaic epic poetry, and that by the sixth century the great *Iliad* and *Odyssey* began to be officially transcribed owing to their Panhellenic dimensions.[29] However, leaving aside the problems of the degrees of multiformity in the epic cycle poems dating from archaic times, what seems to be incontrovertible is that the *Cypria*, among other cyclic poems, was still available at the time when the vases with Ajax and Achilles rolling dice were painted. Moreover, the above-mentioned poems must still have been well known around the time that not only the tragedians but also the sophists were composing their plays and orations. In much the same vein, it is plausible to assume that these traditions, scripts and texts may well have been known by scholars and intellectuals as late as Proclus and Philostratus.

However, as has just been mentioned, it must be emphasized that it was not only tragic poets who were interested in Palamedes. The sophists, too, composed rhetorical exercises on his defence or guiltiness, as the works of Gorgias and Alcidamas show. Of pivotal importance is Alcidamas' testimony on this issue, as this orator is famous for his corrections of the traditional catalogue of Palamedes' inventions.[30] While his Odysseus discredits the majority of the discoveries that Palamedes is commonly claimed to have made, he nevertheless blames Palamedes for having invented board games, the cause of quarrels and idleness in the army. Finally, even those artists in charge of public decorations referred to Palamedes precisely

with the scene of the board-game players, as well as a similar design in a shield strip (415 Kossatz-Deissmann).

[28] Cf. A. *Palamedes* (FF 181–*182a Radt); S. *Odysseus Mainomenos* (FF 462–467 Radt); *Palamedes* (FF 478–481 Radt); *Nauplios Katapleōn-Nauplios Pyrkaeus* (FF 425–428 Radt); Eur. *Palamedes* (FF 578–590 Kannicht). Euripides also mentions Palamedes in *Philoctetes* (F 789d, line 27 Kannicht), *Orestes* 433, and, particularly, in *IA* 198; Astyd. II *Nauplios* (60 F 5 Snell) and *Palamedes* (60 T 5a Snell); Philocl. I *Nauplios* (24 T 1 Snell); Lyc. *Nauplios* (100 T 3 Snell); Gorg. *Palamedes*; Alcid. *Odysseus*; Stesichorus (F 213 Davies) and Pindar (F 260 Snell-Maehler) also devoted some poems, now lost, to Palamedes. See also R. Scodel, *The Trojan Trilogy of Euripides* (Göttingen, 1986) and Falcetto (n. 16). In addition, Euripides is alleged to have composed a 'weighty' verse on Achilles playing *kyboi* (F 888 Kannicht). This verse, pronounced by Dionysus in Ar. *Ran.* 1400, belongs to an unknown and putative Euripidean tragedy linked to the Trojan tradition. Among the different tentative proposals of attribution, ranging from a tragedy to a satyr drama, there are two that are particularly relevant for our purposes here. The first is the one that mentions *Philoctetes*, another enemy of Odysseus and the Achaean leaders, whose disgrace happened at the beginning of the expedition – like Palamedes' – and who could sympathize with Achilles' friendship with the inventor of *kyboi* as a fellow victim of Odysseus' malignancy. The second mentions a first version of the later emended *Telephos*, another play that deals with the first episodes of the expedition, when Palamedes lost his life. See the exhaustive apparatus of the edition by Kannicht (*TGF* 5.2, pages 900–1).

[29] G. Nagy, 'Homeric poetry and problems of multiformity: the "Panathenaic Bottleneck"', *CPh* 96 (2001) 109–19.

[30] Cf. J.L. López Cruces and Campos Daroca, '*Odiseo* o *Contra Palamedes* por traición', in J.L. López Cruces and J. Campos Daroca (transl.), *Alcidamante de Elea: Testimonios y Fragmentos* (Madrid, 2005), 21–9, at 28–9.

as a board player, together with Ajax and other heroes of Trojan mythology.[31] So perhaps it is not unwise to search for a further clue in this fertile tradition.[32]

In my opinion, to demonstrate with total certainty the influence of the historical, literary and political events on the vase-painter is as difficult as, on the other hand, to assure the originality of the pictorial artist independently of any external influence. Nevertheless, I agree with Taplin that it is worth pointing to 'essential references without which the painting loses much of its point to the viewer'.[33] Therefore, in spite of the remaining uncertainty, I tentatively suggest that the influence of the Palamedes literary versions may well be meaningful here. In this particular case, if the economy of the artistic technique refers to Palamedes' inventions and myth, the originality of the artist should be praised for the subtlety of the metonymic means or synoptic view[34] so fitting for figurative art. Once more, the enriching influence and collaboration of the literary and performative traditions – or, again in Taplin's words, of the mythological narratives – with the ornamental ones should be acknowledged.[35] No doubt, the people of the time, with

[31] For Polygnotus' mural of the Underworld in the *lesche* of the Cnidians at Delphi, see Paus. 10.31.1. Ajax and Palamedes appear together in another Nekyia scene depicted on an Attic krater (144 Touchefeu; see Woodford in *LIMC* 7.1 (1994), s.v. Palamedes, 147 and 149. They might also be attested in an Etruscan mirror, apud O. Touchefeu in *LIMC* 1.1 (1981), s.v. Aias 1, 333. On the presence of Palamedes in Etruscan pieces of art, see I. Krauskopf also in *LIMC* 7.1 (1994), s.v. Palamedes, 147–9. The Etruscans seem to have been fascinated by the figure of Palamedes as an inventor (of the scales, board games and writing), as well as by his involvement as a warrior in the Trojan campaign (besides Ajax and other Greek heroes such as Menelaus and Diomedes), in addition to his relation with Philoctetes, another victim of Odysseus' expediency.

[32] Leslie Kurke has also linked this depiction with Palamedes as the classical inventor of board games in antiquity, although her own interpretation of the pictorial motif is not specifically connected with Palamedes' myth as much as with the increasing interest in his inventions in the classical period. She understands the motif as a civic appropriation of the Trojan War story, a translation of the context of the epic traditions to that of the *polis*. The heroes, depicted as hoplites, would be engrossed in an activity that resembled their military duties as a political participation in favour of the *polis*. Although she doesn't dismiss the eschatological reading of the depiction (as Alvar [n. 1]), she particularly underlines the popularity of the reference to board games as a common expression of the civic ideology of the time. Kurke also stresses the self-referential meaning of the motif, particularly in Exekias' own depiction, whose figures are incised as the very pieces employed in board games. See L. Kurke, *Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 272–4. While an interesting interpretation, her political reading of the vase seems not to be in line with Taplin's research on the usual avoidance of direct or explicit political representations in Attic pottery, notwithstanding the civic associations, which Taplin, of course, does admit. See O. Taplin, 'The pictorial record', in P.E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997), 69–90, at 89–90.

[33] Taplin (n. 32), 76.

[34] In terms of Woodford (n. 4).

[35] I consider a fundamental point of departure to be Taplin's consideration of ancient art and literature as 'coexisting worlds in constant interaction': O. Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions Between Tragedy and Greek Vase Painting in the Fourth Century* B.C. (Los Angeles, CA, 2007), 7 and 22. To put it in a nutshell, I apply Taplin's 'method' on 'pots and plays' from the fourth century B.C.E. to a previous practice and tradition: 'But it is my thesis that the viewers of these vases, with their experience of mythological narratives, have to be brought into the picture. It is not the mentality of the producer/painter that is at issue so much as that of the perceiver' (ibid., 25).

their knowledge of relevant mythology, would not miss the point of the board-game players and their particular story.

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