NOTES

Herakles, Peisistratos and the Unconvinced

Robert Cook has again placed us in his debt by two characteristic Notes in *JHS* cvii (1987) 167–71 which sharply dissect, scrutinise and reject some recent hot-headed theories. Of one directed against a theory that I (with others) have proposed over recent years, he writes (n. 2) 'and I think he [Boardman] agrees with much that I say'. In this he is correct.

The problem is the possibility of the political manipulation of myth in the archaic and classical periods in Athens. Cook admits some political allusions which reflect 'results of political action [but] need not have political intent' in the popularity of Theseus from the end of the sixth century on 'with official encouragement it seems'. That this official encouragement came from officers and influential families of the new democracy has been fairly well accepted by scholars for many years. Nor need this now depend only on allusions to new Theseus stories and their common representation in Athenian art, or on accounts of the association of Kimon and his kin with either a sanctuary for Theseus or that worthy's bones. John Barron has shown that even a degree of personal identification with the hero was possible, in Bacchylides' account of Theseus in *Odes* 18, where allusions to Kimon are clear.[1] This being so, it seems no great imposition to suggest that much the same had been true of Herakles in sixth-century Athens. Yet Cook regards this as a form of 'deliberate political propaganda' which he strongly dissociates from the Theseus phenomenon later.

I submit that Herakles in sixth-century Athens is in like case with Theseus in fifth-century Athens, but that whereas a Theseus cycle of stories had to be invented to establish his authority, Herakles came more naturally into play since he had been traditionally regarded as protégé of Athena, the city's goddess, even though his exploits had never involved Athens and Attica. It is in the sixth-century that we can see this anomaly being put right in Athens with the involvement of the hero in the *aition* for the new Lesser Mysteries, which also succeeded in naturalising him as an Athenian citizen;[2] in his overwhelming presence in the art and architectural sculpture of Athens; in the tradition which has Athens the city that first worshipped him as a god.

'The choice of Heracles to represent Pisistratus is not an obvious one': but the choice of Herakles to represent the fortunes and especially the leaders of the city of Athena surely *was* an obvious one, given his special relationship with the goddess which is well attested since Homer, in art and literature, even though not especially strong hitherto in Athens. Moreover, as I tried to show in *RA* 1978, 227–34, the use of the Athena/Herakles partnership to represent Athens was probably not even an Athenian invention, and certainly not an invention of Peisistratos, but associated with the Alcmaeonid family, perhaps at the time of the First Sacred War over Delphi. (Cook sees the point of this in his n. 9 but gives it no weight.) It was the Alcmaeonid Megakles who with Peisistratos devised the tyrant's reentry to Athens in a chariot at 'Athena's' side. That the association might to some degree have become more personal in later years need not reflect on its origins. We have no reason to think that the Theseus revival in the late sixth century had anything to do with one family, although it seems later to have been exploited by the Philaids and by Kimon in particular. And that Herakles 'was a notoriously violent and aggressive hero' did not hamper over centuries, indeed millennia, the readiness of mortal rulers to identify with him.

'Statistics of comparative frequency of representations of Heracles in the arts of various Greek cities are not relevant'. I feel bound to ask 'Why not?' when his relative popularity in Athens was some 60 per cent greater than it was in the arts of the Dorian Peloponnese, where he was at home. And although he seems not to have been worshipped on the Acropolis there were in the tyrants' Athens four pedimental groups on Acropolis buildings in which he was a central figure (I exclude the marble gigantomachy which could be later)[3] and one in Athens city: more than in the whole of the rest of the Greek world in this period. I do not see how this record can be ignored, nor do I see any reasonable explanation for it other than one which gives the hero a special role in Athenian life and politics, rather than cult.

The explanation which I have tested in various articles is based on this record and on observation of new Herakles stories, new variants on traditional stories, and the many new scenes of the goddess and hero which have no specific myth-historical context, all of them peculiar to sixth-century Athens. For most of these novelties plausible (to my mind) reasons can be sought in terms of deliberate use of Athena/Herakles to mirror the fortunes of the Athenian state, and sometimes its leaders, in the manner well familiar to us in the manipulation of myth to suit various purposes in other periods and places. This manipulation was not in the hands of vase-painters, who merely reflect new opinions and stories, though they may sometimes be led to express them in a manner suggested by their narrative medium and its conventions.

After the tyranny Herakles' popularity should have fallen off (Cook, 167). It does: to less than half what it was; but he cannot disappear since he is bound to Athena more than to any family and too deeply embedded in Greek consciousness as the mortal hero who bears all and wins immortality. And our record of him is largely on clay vases where we are very much at the mercy of craftsmen operating with a fairly circumscribed repertory which will conserve motives long after the period of their invention and soon ignore their original intent. Herakles' rise and decline in popularity are shared to a lesser degree by other figures and stories, but none have the special innovative qualities alluded to in my last paragraph.

The episode in which Peisistratos returned to Athens in a chariot beside Phye, dressed as Athena, has been made to appear crucial, yet it was merely a starting

[1] *BICS* xxvii (1980) 1–8.

[2] J. Boardman, *JHS* xcv (1975) 1–12, esp. 6.

[3] I hinted in *Greek sculpture; the archaic period* (1978) 153–4 that some might be from palatial buildings of the tyrant period, and Claude Bérard has adopted the suggestion less cautiously in *Desmos* xi/xii (Oct. 1986) 11.

point. I had observed that the many Athenian vase scenes of Athena with Herakles in a chariot proceeding to (or arriving in Olympus) explain for us the point of the episode.[4] Cook alludes to Warren Moon's argument that the chariot scenes in Athenian art may antedate it. This is possible, indeed likely, since familiarity with such scenes would have guaranteed the ordinary Athenian's recognition of what was implied by the procession. Chariot epiphanies of pairs of deities were long established in Greek art and the Athena/Herakles team was a speciality of Athens. That such scenes were far more popular much later in the sixth century is irrelevant to their existence at and probably before the time of the Phye episode, and their faltering survival in the repertory after the tyranny is a product of vase-painters' conservatism, since they disappear no less slowly than several other Herakles scenes. Moon worried about the impiety of the impersonation, but if the episode happened at all (as I believe it did) it was in a society where the impersonation of deities by mortals in acts of cult and cult-related drama or choral presentation, sometimes of a less than dignified character, was acceptable, and we do not know how far the impersonation by Peisistratos might have gone—probably there was none physically.[5]

Other issues and objects are irrelevant to the main argument though they are important talking-points and pose questions that need answering: such as the Oxford vase with Athena as *Herakleous kore*, or the scene alleged (by others) to show Peisistratos' return after Pallene (which I find improbable): Cook, 168–9 refers.[6] It is sad that we have to rely so much on the vases. I see no need to look on them for any 'political intent' or any possibility that they were the medium for any deliberate political propaganda,[7] though some may have been bespoke with a purpose. They mirrored, through their own conventions, views of myth expressed more explicitly in literature, song or narration, inspired by the needs of society, its leaders and its cults. That Greeks used their myth-history as a mirror to their life, and one which they could readily distort to suit their needs and circumstances, is a commonplace.

What started as an observation of a remarkable parallel between history and art (the Phye story) was fed by knowledge that the phenomenon was a wholly acceptable one for Greeks of the succeeding period and in tune with their treatment of myth from as early as we can discern it, and fattened by a series of further observations about history, cult and art in sixth-century Athens which required explanation, and for which explanation was not readily forthcoming in any other way. Any detail or group of details may be interpreted differently, and disquiet with one aspect cannot amount to a serious discrediting of the whole. Cook has explored all or most of the aspects, with differing emphasis and conclusions. But I expect that he will agree with much that I have said. Taken as a whole the Herakles phenomenon in sixth-century Athens seems inexplicable in any other terms, and for me these remain probabilities until some equally comprehensive and more compelling explanation is offered.

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[4] Also in *JHS* cvii (1987) W. R. Connor takes up this point (pp. 40–50). He cannot see Peisistratos as presenting himself as other than a mortal, not as Herakles, though under the patronage of Athena. That he did not present himself as Herakles seems to me very likely. I doubt whether he wore a lionskin but am equally certain that Herodotus' failure to mention one does not mean that he did not, unless we believe only what survives in written sources, and hold that what was not written never happened. Connor's insistence on the formal aspects of the procession as described is important and not at variance with my views, though to turn an Athena *parabates* into an *apobates* is too much.

[5] For Moon's remarks on this subject see *Ancient Greek art and iconography* (ed. W. Moon; Madison 1983) 96–118. He is disturbed that an 'artist [vase-painter] and clientèle were aware of and concerned about the inner workings of Athenian urban society' (p. 97). But they *were* Athenian urban society and unlikely to be unaware. His other arguments exclude consideration of the more important issues tackled by Cook and he concentrates on one artist (the Priam Painter) whose originality he severely underestimates. I shall revert to this painter's record elsewhere.

[6] He also deals properly and summarily with some other objections (his n. 3): Bazant underestimates how Greeks used myth (here 'symbolism' is quite the wrong word); his essay in his *Studies of the use and decoration of Athenian vases* (Prague 1981) 23–38 is important, but he dwells on the *period* of popularity for Herakles (and others) in Athens rather than the exceptional character of the Athenian scenes, which I allude to above.

[7] I tried to express these reservations in *Ancient Greek and related pottery* (ed. H. A. G. Brijder; Amsterdam 1984) 240–1.

The Wisdom of Lucian's Tiresias

The climactic moment of Lucian's *Necyomantia* occurs when the ludic Cynic preacher, Menippus, finds Tiresias in Hades and poses to him the question which provoked his Homeric quest: what is the best way of life (ποῖόν τινα ἡγεῖται τὸν ἄριστον βίον, 21)? The first part of the Theban's response is clear. He praises the life of 'the ordinary guy'[1] (ὁ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν ἄριστος βίος . . . 21) and urges the Cynic to ignore the philosophers with their metaphysical speculations and instead to pursue one end alone (τοῦτο μόνον ἐξ ἅπαντος θηράσῃ, 21.3–4). It is this end, the kernel of Tiresias' wisdom, which has not been successfully construed by commentators. Tiresias' advice is: ὅπως τὸ παρὸν εὖ θέμενος παραδράμῃς γελῶν τὰ πολλὰ καὶ περὶ μηδὲν ἐσπουδακώς (21.4–5). The Theban's recommendation to Menippus has been described variously as an example of Lucian's 'nihilism'[2] or 'conventional Cynic diatribe'.[3] It is neither. It has no parallel in Cynic teachings as far as I know, but it is not unprecedented. In the new OCT editions M. D. MacLeod carefully notes the many reworkings of Homer and other classical and archaic poets in Lucian but does not indicate that Tiresias' advice recalls both the thought and wording of a famous line of Simonides quoted as a χρεία by Theon: παίζειν ἐν τῷ βίῳ καὶ περὶ μηδὲν ἁπλῶς σπουδάζειν.[4]

[1] *Cf.* Plato, *Rep.* x 620c.

[2] C. A. van Rooy, *Studies in classical satire and related literary theory* (Leiden 1965) 111; *cf.* J. Bernays, *Lucian und die Kyniker* (Berlin 1879) 44.

[3] J. J. Winkler, *Auctor et actor: a narratological reading of Apuleius' 'Golden Ass'* (Berkeley 1985) 271.

[4] This passage (*Rhet. Gr.* i 215 Walz) is accepted as a fragment by Bergk (*Fr.* 192: *PLG* iii 522) and Page (*Fr.* 646: *PMG* 320), though it does not scan properly. It is considered an allusion to Simonides by F. W. Householder Jr., *Literary quotation and allusion in Lucian* (New York 1941) 37. An attribution to Semonides would seem equally possible (*cf.* n. 5). J. Bompaire, *Lucien écrivain: Imitation et création* (Paris 1958) does not mention this passage in his discussion of χρεῖαι