

**Lou de Barbarin** – This is the story of a Greek vase found in Italy in a tomb at the Etruscan site of Cerveteri north of Rome that tells us several stories. That of the picture on the vase and that of the potter who, towards the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, made and signed the vase with his name, Aristonothos. On one side, he painted the famous episode of the Odyssey where Polyphemus is blinded by Ulysses and his companions. The latter appear in the centre on tip-toe, lifting and thrusting the spear into the eye of the drunken Cyclops who is asleep beneath on the right. He wakes up on the instant, his left arm firm on the ground for support, his right arm trying to push away. The fifth person on the far left has his body turned and is thrusting his leg against the wall of the cave - indicated by a line - and this is Ulysses. And this detail shows that the poet is entirely familiar with the Homeric poem because the scene accurately reflects song IX of the Odyssey. This has the hero tell how he stood high at one end of the sharpened trunk and twisted the spear hard while his friends held it in place, just as a craftsman and his workers pierce a ship's beam with a drill. It is indeed a naval battle that is represented on the other side of the vase. On the left, a ship with a flat hull and an elongated prow tipped with a ram and an apotropaic eye is manoeuvred by a warrior at the helm and by five rowers. On the bridge, three helmeted warriors, armed with lances and round shields, confront the enemy ship on the right. This is a sailing ship with a deep hull and double rudder on whose bridge three warriors are preparing to assault, probably directed by the look-out up high on the mast. The suggested identification is of a Greek warship on the left, maybe Greeks from Sicily, and of an Etruscan merchant's ship on the right.

We can tell quite a few stories with this vase. There are as many interpretations as commentators and that is good proof that the potter has succeeded in his aim. Because prompting discussion is probably one of the functions of the vase. It is what is called a krater, a vase in which are mixed water and wine that will be consumed during a banquet that is a great occasion for story-telling. Behind these scenes may be a moral addressed to those who are consuming the wine, warning them of the dangers of the drunkenness to which the Cyclops succumbed where he, unlike the Greeks, drank his wine neat without it being mixed with water in the Krater.

There may equally be a notion of trickery, the *mêtis*, drawing on one of the most famous episodes of Ulysses and maybe also by the symbol, under the handles, of a painted crab, an animal known for its craftiness in the Greek bestiary. There is also a story of violence that we see in the figure of the man-eating monster itself, the gesture of the Greeks in blinding the Cyclops as blood spurts from his eye and the confrontation at sea. The latter evokes the real dangers faced by Greeks who undertook voyages at that time to the boundaries of their world, particularly in the Tyrrhenian Sea where the Etruscans practiced piracy.

We can pick up some stories about the potter as well. His signature is here, above the Cyclops. From right to left we read *Aristonothos époisen*, Aristonothos made

me. For once we know the name of the potter which is most unusual for this period and the dream of every ceramicist. But it's rare for it to be so difficult to learn anything about the personality of the artist. And for good reason: the shape of the Krater is comparable to those in Argolide, in the Peloponnese. The style and technique on the other hand originate from Athens with a slight cycladic influence. The signature itself is in the Ionian dialect and in the Eubean alphabet. Perhaps the persons in the main scene recall those of vases found in Sicily, in Syracuse and Megara Hyblaea. However it may be, the brush strokes come from the hand of a master, the lines are at once supple, rapid and precise, without any sign of hesitancy. We can easily work out why Aristonothos, aware of his talent, was keen to sign his work.

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