

Abstract

The present thesis examines Homer's description of the Shield of Achilles and Minoan miniature frescoes, particularly the *Sacred Grove and Dance Fresco* and *Grandstand Fresco*. It uses them as examples to explore the transmission of ideas between cultures – the intensely visual Minoan civilisation of the Bronze Age centred on Crete and the earliest cultural strata of ancient Greece – that preferred different means of representation, painting, and poetry. Because Minoan fresco painting was essentially non-narrative and not accompanied by readable written records, so that “deciphering” its iconography is not an option, the thesis argues that we can learn about general cultural perceptions from interpreting and analysing how techniques of representation in painting and poetry treat the representation of time and space. From the relationship that these techniques establish with the beholders of the representation, we can infer their self-understanding. If the world appears to us as an intricate complex of cultural representations, the way we interact with them reflects our sense of our human place in the world.

The non-narrative techniques of Minoan frescoes – particularly the use of vertical perspective, the absence of a fixed point of view, suppressed focalisation, and map-like composition – are shown as well traceable in the description of the Shield, though here partially subordinated to new cosmological and anthropological ideas. Like the frescoes, the description of the Shield articulates spatial relationships, while temporal ones are characterised primarily by simultaneity; the vertical perspective keeps the viewer within the depiction, as if in a landscape on the Shield's surface. While the bard's presence occasionally provokes reflection on the depicted, the presence of focalisers refining the beholder's relationship to the depicted remains dispersed, as does the Homeric person. Since the viewer is on the surface and the land is perceived as untraversable (the shores of Okeanos are spatially and cognitively unapproachable to humans), the Shield cannot be understood as a model of the world since the external space in which the viewer's gaze might situate itself has not yet been constructed. Only Anaximander will extend this notion of an untraversable landscape to space outside the Earth itself and the celestial bodies, and from the space thus obtained, it will be possible to see the Earth as a whole for the first time. I believe that this construction of the distant point of view was deliberately avoided by the Aegean civilisation of the Bronze Age, and its application in later Greek culture led to a different perception of space, time, personal identity, and especially the human place in the world.

Key words

Minoan Frescoes – Shield of Achilles – Non-Narrative Representations – Vertical Perspective – Point of View – Focalisation – Anaximander

