

Report on:
Mgr. Lucie Valentinová, *The Shield of Achilles: Minoan Representational Conventions
in the Early Greek Poetry and Thought*

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The submitted dissertation is a well-argued and original interpretation of Minoan miniature frescoes (with a particular focus on the *Sacred Grove and Dance Fresco* and *Grandstand Fresco*) in the light of the Homeric shield of Achilles as an *ekphrasis* that may preserve some traces of the Minoan influence. This pairing, which has been suggested in earlier literature but was never taken so seriously and carried out in such a wealth of detail, enables the author to give a new relief to the transmission of ideas between the Minoan culture that survived through its archaeological and visual record, and the earliest Greek culture that we cannot help but view through the Homeric lenses. Since the transmission in question was no doubt a multilayered enterprise of which many strata are lost to us, one has to applaud the choice to focus on the predominantly non-narrative Minoan frescoes on the one hand, and the Homeric shield as such a fresco painted in words within the most influential epic poem. It is precisely this choice that allows the author to bring her ancient subject matter in dialogue with the most contemporary interests in interculturality, narrative, and the relations between word and image. Needless to say, I find this work full of important insights and more than fit to be publicly defended; my preliminary evaluation is “passed” (or, in Czech, “prospěla”).

Before coming to several claims argued for in the dissertation, I wish to remark on the general issue of methodology. I think the submitted text exemplifies the fact that, when it comes to the word and image issues that reach beyond the iconographic analysis and cannot be carried out with the help of a preserved archival record, it is possible – and, indeed, necessary – to be rigorous without using only some preestablished, broadly applicable method. The researcher has to bring to life, by her own words and imagination, those space and time capsules that survived in the shape of, say, a piece of mural painting. In the case of this dissertation, the imaginative engagement is all the more necessary that the frescoes in question cannot be interpreted in the light of a recorded narrative corpus. Remarkably, the author recurs to the Homeric shield not in order to supplement such a corpus, which would amount to view the relation between the text and the image as a sort of illustration. Instead of such too narrow a view, she searches for what we could describe as a reenactment through amplification where the visual and the verbal connect and merge without any firmly established hierarchy of an original and a derivative representation. Such reenactment makes it possible to accommodate differences not only between cultures but also, importantly, between media of representation. This is exactly what is at stake in the submitted dissertation: every image, while appropriated and reworked, passes through the mind where it can be projected on an entirely new scale, and this re-scaling can then be expressed in the chosen material support. Naturally, when we go from the fresco, whose scale is necessarily determinate, to the ecphrastic shield that can expand any part of representation without externally imposed limits, we need to be especially alert to the interpretative dimension of every passage from pictures to words, be they the

words of a poet or a modern researcher. The only reliable method in this case is the relentless checking of words and images and vice versa, with a constant alertness to the fact that words tend much more naturally towards expansion – like in the case of the enlargement towards cosmological horizon in the Homeric shield.

One last preliminary word in favor of the submitted dissertation: the methodological marriage of rigor with fluidity is all the more necessary when the interpretation faces issues burdened with the traditional suspicion of anachronism. It is true that, in the art-historical circles at least, this suspicion gave recently way to various way of using the unavoidable anachronism in a conscious and controlled manner (see, among many others, the work of Alexander Nagel or Keith Moxey). But it is still important to emphasize that the author’s handling of varied material is all the more remarkable that it concerns transpositions in time as well as media. It is then logical that she takes one further step and brings in the issue of representation and its non-narrative dimension in another cultures entirely. In particular, the work of Svetlana Alpers on the mapping impulse in Dutch landscape painting is used in an illuminating way: it allows us to give a fuller meaning to the use of vertical as opposed to proto-linear perspective on the Minoan walls (on this issue, see below, where I will also suggest that – and why – “the mixture of distance and absorption” discussed *via* Alpers could equally benefit from Michael Fried’s opposite notions of absorption and theatricality).¹

So much for the basic methodological remarks, which mostly reinforce what the text lays out, much more patiently and thoroughly, in its Introduction. One last theme of the latter deserves however a special emphasis: the prevailing non-narrativity proper to Minoan frescoes and to Homer’s ecphrastic shield. As already the dissertation’s Preface makes clear, the non-narrative representation presents a real challenge for any interpreter, not in the least because of our fully natural propensity to “slip into interpreting almost any figural representation in narrative terms before any detailed analyses of techniques of representation are even initiated” (IV). In the case of Minoan frescoes, the missing narrative was often supplied by connecting them to the ritual, but this connection is indeed a construal that tends to overlook the main and most obvious features of the frescoes as painterly creations (see below on chapter III.4). Also, the lack of obvious mythological underpinning is a feature shared with the Homeric shield, a text whose non-narrative structure was “redeemed”, already in ancient times, by subjecting it to the allegorical reading that turns it into a full-blown theoretical cosmology. The great virtue of this dissertation is to bring to our attention how all these interpretative efforts fail at doing full justice to their objects, and then at offering a fresh re-reading of these objects that are fruitfully paired, but certainly not collapsed into one. On the contrary, the comparison of the

¹ To reassure the traditionalists, it should be added that the dissertation quotes a similar use of methodological anachronism (but with a different scope) by Judith Weingarten, “War Scenes and Ruler Iconography in a Golden Age: Some Lessons on Missing Minoan Themes from the United Provinces (17th c A.D.)”, in: Robert Laffineur (ed.), *POLEMOS: Le contexte guerrier en Égée à l’âge du Bronze = Aegaeum* 19, 1999, 347-357. Even more broadly, Charles Gates, “The Adoption of Pictorial Imagery in Minoan Wall Painting: A Comparativist Perspective”, *Hesperia Supplements* Vol. 33, 2004 (= *XAPIΣ: Essays in Honor of Sara A. Immerwahr*, ed. by Anne P. Chapin), 27-46, compares the apparently sudden advent of pictorial imagery in Minoan wall paintings to similar events in late Medieval Siena, 16th-century Malinalco (Mexico), and 20th-century Mexico.

frescoes with the ephrastic shield invites us to be more alert to the specificity of their media and location, be it on the wall or in the poet's or audience's chest.

That much being clear, I will now go through the dissertation with an eye for selected salient points. Due to the limitations of space (not to speak about the avowed lack of my competence) I leave aside the Introduction's discussion of the historical and cultural framework that sets the necessary prerequisites for a detailed study and comparison of the Homeric shield and the frescoes. I find this discussion well-crafted and perfectly suited to its purpose: it brings out both the complexity of cultural and cultural transmissions and the constantly changing modern appreciation of the distant past (in the author's words, "historical circumstances and scholars' preferences", 6). What is probably most important for the main subject, is the emphasis on how understudied the properly visual dimension of Minoan culture has been. To a degree, I find this true of any culture, but the present case is sharpened by the absence of a written record that many interpreters tend to supply by referring to either ritual or myth. Equally valuable will be the author's attention to the transmission that can perfectly well occur through different visual media: portable art objects such as textiles or vases are certainly important agents of contact and iconographic influence.

A detailed inquiry into this influence is prefaced by a concise case study, which consists in a fresh treatment of the Homeric shield of Achilles, with a focus on its modern reception and on what the latter overlooks or is simply uninterested in (hence its title ("The Shield of Achilles in the Eyes and Hands of Moderns Interpreters"). As a result, this chapter presents us with a broad overview of previous scholarship that is complemented by the original discussion of the possible Minoan influence. I will not reiterate various readings of the shield, but I wish to stress several points, the first of which being the author's insistence on the absence of any clear information concerning the shield's overall shape. This is a crucial point since the prevailing assumption of a round shield is heavily influenced by the evocation of Okeanos at the end of the whole *ekphrasis*, which is however read through the later cosmologies. What lines 18.606-607 undoubtedly say is that Okeanos marks the outer limits or the edge of the shield (see the use of the rather neutral *πόματος*, and also of *ἄντροξ*, which *LSJ* takes for "rim of round shield", referring also to *Iliad* 6.118 where, however, it is question of an ox-hide shield that may, but need not have been circular). Every exact determination of the shield's shape is unavoidably speculative and there seems to be a reason for this: nowhere does Homer indicate what exactly should the spatial arrangement of the scenes on the shield be. Hence, as the author rightly notices, the impossibility to follow later interpreters in taking the shield for an emblem or icon of a spheric cosmos. The notional space of the shield is fragmented into many views with varying perspectival options, situating the audience at different distance from the object of its attention. There is no doubt that we can find a logic in the succession of individual scenes, but this logic is not a narrative one, nor does it obey the generalizing cosmological impulse. Neither narrative nor obviously symbolic, the shield (except for the narration of its making, one so dear to Lessing) escapes the optics of the Aristotelian *muthos* as a story that is supposed to become a meaningful, self-enclosed organic whole (see *Poetics* 1451a2-6, trans. Bywater: "Just in the same way, then, as a beautiful whole made up of parts,

or a beautiful living creature, must be of some size, but a size to be taken in by the eye, so a story or plot must be of some length, but of a length to be taken in by the memory”).

To sum up, what makes the shield unique even within the *Ilias* is its refusal to be cut down to the rules of narrative poetry. Although Hephaestus’ creation was often seen as a figure of the poet and his creative enterprise, the god’s metallurgy implies much more logically the world of arts and crafts that produce tangible objects of different kinds and at different scales. Some such object are part of the shield’s design, including the one that the author pays, quite naturally, a special attention to: the dancing floor, “like that which once in the wide spaces of Knossos / Daidalos built for Ariadne of the lovely tresses” (18.591-592, trans. Lattimore).² The dance is a strikingly pervasive motion forged on the shield, this being the last, most elaborate of its three instances. I think the dissertation is right to take most seriously the fact that, in the long Homeric *ekphrasis*, only these lines contain a concrete cultural reference. Of course, this fact has been remarked upon by previous readers, but never with such a detailed attention to the context of Minoan visual culture. The *ekphrasis* of dancing figures and of their carefully orchestrated motions is visually rich even in the context of the shield; its affinity with the figures on Minoan frescoes may seem obvious, but the author will take care of grounding this affinity in a more technical comparison between the ecphrastic technique deployed in these lines and the non-narrative focalization used to a great effect in Minoan art. Also, and very importantly, the author will be alert to the interplay between the figurative and the ornamental components of the complex ecphrastic dance, whose scheme brings together some motifs that are prominent in Minoan visual record.

This attention will bring its fruits in the dissertation’s treatment of, especially, the affinity between the motion of the *choros* and the Minoan “running spirals”. This treatment shows how the figural and the ornamental complement and even permeate each other, not in the least because they not subjected to a unifying perspectival treatment. Instead they run together through the world, much in the same way as the rotational *and* serpentine motion of the dance on the Homeric shield gives way to the “running around” of the Ocean that prolongates it. This prolongation cannot be neglected when we try to interpret the whole of the Shield, simply because it saves from reading the later in the light of later cosmologies. As the author aptly puts it in her introductory summary: “Such an image further deflects from seeing Okeanos encircling the Earth from the point of view of external space” (13). The Shield does not *depict* the world by lending it one unified shape; instead, at its crucial moment, it uses an ordering reminiscent of the “running spirals” not equidistant from a notional geometric centre. In this respect, one may think that what connects the poet of the ecphrastic shield and the Minoan artist is a shared intuition of the limits of human experience: the limits that will not be shifted by philosophical cosmologies and their recourse to imaginatively constructed wholes. Seen in this light, it is philosophy rather than art that engages in fictional world-building. Art,

² Obviously, if we take seriously the option that the poet hints here at the “crane dance” instituted by Theseus on his return from Crete (see Plutarch, *Theseus* 21.1), the cultural filiation with Crete is only reinforced. It was suggested that the dance was Minoan in origin; see e.g. Lillian Brady Lawler, “The Geranos Dance: A New Interpretation”, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 77, 1946, 112-130, and, especially, Marcel Detienne, “La grue et le labyrinthe”, *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Antiquité* 95, n°2, 1983, 541-553 (and variously reprinted).

with its mixture of fantasy and skepticism, engages instead in more detailed observations that pair well with the mapping quality of representation, a quality that the author discussed from several angles.

This discussion is one of the dissertation's main virtues, not in the least because of its above-mentioned methodological freshness. As it should be, however, its point of departure is, first and foremost, observational: it consists in noticing the prevalence of spatial over temporal relations in Minoan frescoes and realizing that the same topography is typical of the scenes on the ecphrastic shield. In both cases, the co-presence of various seasons (implied by the kinds of flower that bloom on frescoes and the various constellation represented on the Shield) is an important indication that this is a conscious representational strategy different from a static depiction of one place in one instant. To better bring out this map-like quality and the reasons behind it, the author broadens her comparative scope and turns, for comparison, to Svetlana Alpers' 1983 classic *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*.

It is unnecessary to discuss here Alpers' complex book that mobilizes theories of vision and finds bridges between these theories and artistic practice. The details of this account are still being discussed, but the core of its usefulness for this dissertation consists in its reconstruction of perspectival representations different from the one point perspective typical of the narrative art of Italian quattrocento. Instead of the linear perspective, we deal with a different handling of proximity and distance, a handling that is not governed by the relation between (or the axis connecting) the vanishing point and the external viewer who looks "into" the picture. Rather, the scene depicted internalizes its viewer whose proximity to representation implies a shifting point of view. The result no doubt reinforces the tactile dimension of the picture, not unlike the ecphrastic account that simultaneously mobilizes particular scenes together with the materials used in their making. In the case of Dutch paintings – but I think this holds for the dissertation's material too – this procedure results in a blurring of the frontier between the representation and the represented, and Alpers herself quotes the magnificent lines of Henry James who bring this uncertain threshold to life: "When you are looking at the originals, you seem to be looking at the copies; and when you are looking at the copies, you seem to be looking at the originals. Is it a canal-side in Haarlem, or is it a Van der Heyden? (...) The maid servants in the street seem to have stepped out of the frame of a Gerald Dou and are equally adapted for stepping back again. (...) We have to put on a very particular set of spectacles and bend our nose well over our task, and beyond our consciousness that our gains are real gains, remain decidedly at loss how to classify them."³

"At loss how to classify them" is a perfect diagnosis of a feeling in front of some Minoan frescoed figures and landscapes, and the same applies to various scenes on the ecphrastic shield whose inner lifelikeness was commented already in ancient times by the scholiasts who emphasized that some verbal constructions make it impossible to neatly decide whether they

³ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 26-27; quoted from Henry James, "In Holland", in *Transatlantic Sketches*, 4th ed., Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1868, 382-383.

refer to the image or to that of which it is an image.⁴ Naturally, the shared equivocation that concerns the dividing line separating the representation from the represented is not something on which a firm case for cultural transmission could be build. But this is not what the author tries to do; instead, she uses Alpers and Dutch painting to address the underlying issue of non-narrativity. In this context, she builds her case founded on the formally persuasive analysis of Minoan frescoes and their means to guide the “mobile eye” (Alpers’ term) whose perspective on the painting is constantly shifting, precluding the emergence of a fully centered observer. Contrary to Alpers, she cannot rely on any contemporary theories, but it should be noted that the absence of a *direct* textual theorizing of the paintings in question is, all thing considered, similar in both cases. In this situation, Alpers offers new ideas worth pondering, especially where the issue of culturally informed gaze comes in the foreground. However, these ideas never outweigh the author’s own take on Minoan frescoes and other visual artefacts. A close attention paid to non-narrative representational devices – from suppressed focalisation and maps-like organization to vertical perspective – forms a true backbone of this dissertation, especially because the author pairs these devices with the equivalent techniques used in the Homeric *ekphrasis* to manipulate our imagination. Chapter III.4, which contains the core of the formal analysis of Minoan frescoes, thus dispels any fear of uncontrolled anachronism and introduces first a restatement of the case against reading Minoan frescoes in the light of the ritual (III.5), and then a summarizing statement about the Minoan culture’s treatment of space (III.6). This argumentative sequence progresses rigorously, yet without dispelling the charm of its source material. In other words, it turn the difficulty “to classify” to its advantage by showing why exactly a map-like depiction is not classificatory.

Again, there would be a lot to discuss on the basis of these pages. I will limit myself to a remark on chapter III.4.4 “Absorption and Distance”. As the author emphasizes, especially when covering the room’s three walls, Minoan frescoes address the viewer in a way that further reinforces their low narrativity. The viewer, whose point of view cannot but repeatedly shift, is enveloped in the space of representation any yet not directly engaged by the depicted figures. The resulting dialectics of absorption and distance has nothing mechanical, and it is initiated even by the representations on a smaller scale – even then, the viewer’s gaze tends to dissolve in the non-narrative space with a variable scale and it is the attention to detail – be it one scene among many or a material detail of some particular object – that allows the gaze to rest and recharge (so to speak). Remarkably, however, the figures that invite such rest, do not themselves return our gaze (as, for instance, apotropaic shields do). Often, they literalize the absorption by being absorbed in their own world, wherein we are invited but constantly kept at a distance. This is a much discussed scheme, although the material in question is usually very modern. Michael Fried’s *Absorption and Theatricality* is the most famous example that analyses French 18th-century painting in the light of Diderot’s understanding of “absorption” that opposes “theatricality” excludes, from the representation, any consciousness of viewing: the figures are absorbed in their task with no attention for being viewed.⁵ Clearly, the category

⁴ Some of these scholies are quoted and discussed in Andrew Sprague Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995, 124-130.

⁵ Michael Fried’s *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980, is also one of the works that influenced Svetlana Alpers.

of absorption can be legitimately applied to any relevant representation from previous periods and the submitted dissertation offers two great examples in striking juxtaposition: Vermeer's *Letter-Reader* (Fig. 19, p. 48) and *Wounded Woman* from the Minoan Adorants fresco (Fig. 20, p. 49). The avoidance of direct interaction with the viewer results from a clearly parallel strategy and, in the Minoan case, the device is further reinforced by the lack of attention from the surrounding figures. Such non-narrative absorption is suitable to an ecphrastic reworking and the Homeric shield will offer various instances discussed by the author, without any rigid effort at transforming absorption into a necessary part of non-narrative dispositive (after all, the above-mentioned scene of the dance of the labyrinthine floor is an example of a collective action that is both self-absorbed and performed for the viewers and its *ekphrasis* takes into account both registers; also, there are scenes that imply the *possibility* of viewing of which the objects of the *may but need not* be conscious – the most striking case is the king who is said to silently stand by the line of the reapers at work, see *Iliad* 18.556-557, and the dissertation's comment on p. 71 n. 31: "It, however, remains a question, if the king standing in silence, staff in hand and happiness in his heart, can function as the internal focaliser (...). On one hand, as a king he is a rather elusive figure; on the other hand, some of his emotional state is alluded to us.").

In a similar vein, there would be much to add to this dissertation's every page and I am certain that its public defense will occasion precisely such discussions, including one that might touch upon the issue of absorption and distance in the case of non-human objects, for instance the parts of the landscape that cannot be conscious of being viewed in any usual sense of the term and yet may or may not be integral part of either narrative or non-narrative depiction. Think, for instance, of how the Homeric *ekphrasis* employs a motif well-known from Minoan art, one of the reed, which seems echoed on the Homeric shield as the reed bed at 18.575-576: "a pasturing place by a sounding / river, and beside the moving field of a reed bed." Naturally, the relation to many Minoan representations of the reed is conjectural, but it is interesting that we find the reed beds on Minoan walls and on the pottery, in other words on the immovable as well as movable cultural artefacts.⁶

The issue of transmission forms the background to chapter IV, which gives the dissertation its own *Ringkomposition*. Returning to the Homeric shield, it summarizes again and most clearly its main polemical target, *viz.* the idea "that the oral epic tradition was already flourishing in the Bronze Age, whether as autonomous Minoan or pre-Greek tradition. The fresco paintings are subsequently supposed to have originated as its illustrations or visual counterparts" (64). This scheme, as the author reminds us, was often taken for an instance of "universal cultural development"; hence C. H. Whitman's suggestion that "poetry might be expected to lead the plastic arts in the history of any culture"(quoted *ibid.*). To suggest that, in a given case, we reverse this perspective, is not to introduce a symmetrically opposite dogma. The point of departure is not any allegedly universal cultural scheme, but a recognition of the intensely

⁶ All this is certainly nothing that the author would not know; I was reminded of it by Andreas Vlachopoulos, "The Reed Motif in the Thera Wall-Paintings and Its Association with Aegean Pictorial Art", in Susan Sherratt (ed.), *The Wall Paintings of Thera: Proceedings of the First International Symposium*, Athens, Petros M. Nomikos and the Thera Foundation, 2000, vol. 2, 631-656.

visual character of the remains of Minoan culture, a character that cannot be explained away by the (actually entirely hypothetical) loss of a corresponding written record. This assumption leads to the comparison with the ephrastic shield of Achilles more naturally than it might seem at the first glance. In fact, the non-narrative character of this *ekphrasis*, inserted in the epic poem, is enough to cast serious doubts on Whitman's suggestion. It is fairly obvious that the shield-*ekphrasis* in *Iliad* 18 exhibits strong influence of visual arts, and that this influence, or rather influences, go way back in time. The Shield's appeal comes from its simultaneous novelty *and* anachronicity, the latter following from the appropriation of, for instance, some Phoenician bronze or silver bowls that exhibit battles or lion hunts. Naturally, it is easier to spot the connections to those artefacts that were produced by metallurgy and related crafts, but the poet, while crafting his Shield, may have been equally inspired by painted pottery, seals or signet-rings. The hypothesis of a connection that goes back to Minoan frescoes fits therefore well in this context precisely because the poet, elaborating his non-narrative relief, would echo a similarly non-narrative representational strategy.

In this respect, it is perhaps opportune to quote an authoritative account of the Homeric shield that does not look for its possible antecedents, but evaluates the poet's creation in the context of the advent of Greek pictorial narrative. In his *Image and Myth*, Luca Giuliani offers a well-articulated appreciation of the way the Shield interferes with the surrounding narrative. The quotation is long, but it sums up the crucial difference:

Above all it is important to remember that we are dealing here with two fundamentally different media with distinct representational possibilities: text and image. The interruption of the narrative mode within the text is occasioned by the appearance of an image. The descriptive character of the image in turn has an effect on the text by causing the poem to adopt the descriptive mode. Precisely at the moment when the text begins to engage with the images on the shield it moves from narration to description. This is a curious technique, one that indicates the poet's implicit insight into the fundamental difference between image and text. The purposeful and systematic avoidance of narrative elements only makes sense if we assume it is based on the poet's conviction that stories have no place within the horizon of images, that images can only access the world through description and not through narration. Of course the principle occupation of the epic poet consisted in telling stories; and if at some point he wanted to describe in detail rather than narrate, it makes sense that he should draw on the image, that he should invoke, as it were, the image as a paradigm. The shield description in the *Iliad* thus yields a number of insights that might be relevant to the interpretation of pictorial works from this period. Chief among these is the fact that both the poet and his public seem to assume that the primary business of images consists in descriptively reflecting the world and not in telling stories, as poets do.⁷

The split between non-narrative image and narrative poem would therefore reflect the poet's decision that assigns the image a crucial role: to present us with the world as independent of human making. And it is to this presentation that the dissertation's last chapter pays a close attention, starting with the acknowledgment that "[c]ompared to Minoan landscape frescoes, the topography of the Shield is more universal and slightly more abstract. It depicts not only the known world but also Okeanos and the celestial sphere. Nevertheless, and contrary to

⁷ Luca Giuliani, *Image and Myth: A History of Pictorial Narration in Greek Art*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2013, 25-26 (the original *Bild und Mythos: Geschichte der Bilderzählung in der griechischen Kunst* is from 2003).

what is quite often suggested, I do not think that the Shield can be considered as a model of the universe, and the celestial sphere is probably depicted only from below” (68).

This observation is fundamental and I agree. What it means that the ecphrastic shield cannot be reduced to a proto-philosophical cosmology, regardless of various elements that it shares with Presocratic texts. This is well discussed in chapter IV.5 on “the absence of cosmogony” from the Shield: the latter offer no alternative to the Hesiodic cosmogony and, in contrast to later philosophical text, it does not accompany its cosmographic components by a conceptual scheme of generation. The “backwards going” Okeanos serves here as a topographic limit, but its function is mostly to reinforce the universal motion with a hint of rotation that mirrors the celestial motions: the oceanic whirl offers a closure very different from a narrative one, and if it marks the limits of human experience, the latter would still be an experience of a far-away place, not of some mythically personified power (the Ocean is, among other things, where the crane fly to escape the winter, see *Iliad* 3.4-5; interestingly, the *Iliad* tends to associate Ocean with glimmering light and other visual qualities). All this is why the Okeanos will preserve its ecphrastic independence, so to speak, in the Pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield* 314-320, where it teams with ecphrastic life (swans, fish) and amazes Zeus himself. Okeanos may offer a view of what is inaccessible to humans, but its less a neatly traced *peras* than a wondrous limitrophe zone. This point is relevant to the discussion of boundaries in chapter IV.7 and, as such, must not be forgotten in any discussion of the shift that occurred between the composition of the Shield and the advent of philosophical cosmologies.

I believe that the author’s discussion of this shift forms a logical closure of her dissertation, but naturally not a *telos* that would be imposed on the real historical variety. On the contrary, the virtue of this discussion consists in reminding us, once again, of the otherness that cannot be ascribed to some *but not other* strata of a visual or a textual record. The most admirable feature of this dissertation consists therefore in preserving such otherness even in the detailed analyses of technical issues of both the painter’s and the poet’s craft. These issues are too rich to be addressed in this report, but they could be profitably discussed during the public defense, including, unsurprisingly, various details of non-narrative representational devices.

All in all, Lucie Valentinová created an engaging piece of scholarship that testifies to her command of the literature from various fields and, even more importantly, to her capacity of finding something new in the much-discussed material. I am confident that the submitted work will find its way into the press – it certainly more than “meets the standard customarily required of a doctoral dissertation”. For this reason, I assess it as “Pass” and recommend the public defense.

Prague, September 6, 2021

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