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PINS, PESTLES, AND WOMEN: A MATERIAL APPROACH TO FEMALE VIOLENCE IN ANCIENT GREECE

The article examines the relationship of women and the objects surrounding them in the light of the term 'affordance'. Coined by psychologist James J. Gibson, the term refers to the potentialities held by an object for a particular set of actions, stemming from its material properties. Through focusing on two case studies in which women use mundane objects (mainly pins and pestles) in violent situations – (a) stories (told by Herodotus and Euripides) about women attacking with pins, and (b) a group of vases representing women attacking with pestles – the article seeks to uncover a fundamental aspect of the engagement of women with the objects surrounding them, as envisioned by the men creating the literature and art. Deprived of almost any access to real weapons, these women are depicted as turning to objects in their immediate environment. Perceiving the affordances of these objects, stemming from their shape and material and the inherent potentialities for action, the women make use of them in acts of self-defence, anger, or revenge.

Keywords: affordances, pins, pestles, Orpheus, Herodotus

Material and materiality in ancient Greek society are issues that have been steadily gaining increasing attention in recent scholarship. Tackled from various viewpoints and addressed in a number of publications,[1] this 'new materialism' perspective aims to question the

[1] For example, R. Bielfeldt, 'Vorwort', in R. Bielfeldt (ed.), *Ding und Mensch in der Antike. Gegenwart und Vergegenwärtigung* (Heidelberg, 2014), 7 ff.; M. Telò and M. Mueller, 'Introduction: Greek Tragedy and the New Materialism', in M. Telò and M. Mueller (eds.), *The Materialities of Greek Tragedy. Objects and Affect in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides* (New York, 2018), 1–11; M. Gaifman and V. Platt. 'Introduction: From Grecian Urn to Embodied Object', *Art Hist.* 41.3 (2018), 402–19.

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anthropocentric view that presumes a clear hierarchy between human and objects and to draw our attention to the power, vitality, and agency inherent in objects. In earlier research, ancient Greek artefacts, both real and imagined, were discussed from various vantage points such as material culture studies, object agency, thing theory, and performance studies. Recently, the question of the artefacts' relationship to the human body and the way in which they become parts or extensions of it has come to the fore within the scholarship.[2] This newer focus on the interaction between the two entities – the human and the inanimate object – comprises an important link in the understanding of the place of objects among humans in ancient times.

One term of great potential interest that is closely related to this new materialistic view in general, and to the issue of human–object interaction in particular, is 'affordance'. I will be making the argument here that this concept is essential and indeed fundamental to the understanding of the relationship between human and objects, as reflected in both visual and verbal representations. In the recent shift towards a more balanced view of human–object relations, this term, and the theory in which it is a central notion, is unavoidable and necessary.

Affordance: definition and meaning

The term affordance was originally coined by the perceptual psychologist James J. Gibson in the late 1960s, and was introduced in its full-fledged form in his book *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, published in 1979.[3] I have already elaborated on the term elsewhere, and here I will summarize its relevant aspects.[4]

In its current iteration, the term affordance refers to the potentialities held by an object for a particular set of actions based on its physical properties: its shape, design, and materials. Affordances are perceived by humans in a direct, immediate way with no sensory or cognitive processing; our knowledge of what we can do with such objects is instantaneous. Lying between humans on the one hand and the

[2] Gaifman and Platt (n. 1), 408; M. Gaifman, 'The Greek Libation Bowl as Embodied Object', *Art Hist.* 41.3 (2018), 445.

[3] J. J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston, 1979), 127–37.

[4] Y. Young, 'A Painful Matter: The Sandal as a Hitting Implement in Athenian Iconography', *Humanities & Social Sciences Comms.* 7.64 (2020), 6–7; Y. Young, 'The Representation of Pointed Amphorae in Athenian Vase Paintings: An Iconographic Study', *Art Style | Art & Culture Int. Mag.* 7 (2021), 160–2. Both articles contain further relevant bibliography.

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features and properties of the objects surrounding them on the other, affordance serves to connect the needs and abilities of the two respectively. It is all about the relationship between people and things.

This paper will emphasize one important feature of the concept: its intentionality. We know that the way in which we use an object is related to our goals and needs. Any given object may possess many latent affordances, but which of these will surface depends on the situation.

Contemporary scholars additionally like to emphasize affordance's sociocultural dimension. The way in which we engage with objects is dictated mainly by social norms. Objects are intentionally shaped and designed for a certain purpose, known as their 'canonical affordance', a term indicating that they '*already* embody human intentions'.[5] When objects are used as intended (for example, a chair used for sitting) this is termed 'normative usage'.[6] Yet we can perceive other, latent affordances that support usages other than those intended by the designer of the object. These may range from still somewhat normative (for example, a chair used as a ladder) to entirely non-normative (a chair used as a hat).

Affordances surface not only in real objects but in images too. In dealing with ancient societies, we lack direct experience and must of necessity fall back on representations of various types. Verbal and visual representations are a primary source for understanding the interaction between humans and objects and of the potential actions they afford, at least as envisioned by their makers.[7] With this in mind, I will now proceed to apply the term affordance in two case studies: (a) stories about women attacking with pins, and (b) a group of vases representing women attacking with pestles.

Every human is capable of perceiving affordances, and, in parallel, every object possesses latent affordances that may be perceived at any time. Indeed, we could apply the term to many situations and stories represented in Greek visual and verbal images in which objects appear. My decision to focus specifically on these two cases, however, stems from the fact that such violent and extreme situations revolving around

[5] A. Costall and A. Richards, 'Canonical Affordances: The Psychology of Everyday Things', in P. Graves-Brown, R. Harrison, and A. Piccini (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World* (Oxford, 2013), 87.

[6] C. Knappett, *Thinking Through Material Culture. An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Philadelphia, 2005), 47; Costall and Richards (n. 5), 87–90.

[7] For a pioneering application of the concept to ancient images, see, e.g., A. Shapland, 'The Minoan Lion: Presence and Absence on Bronze Age Crete', *World Arch.* 42.2 (2010), 273–89.

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women grant us a lucid view on what affordances are and how the term may be applied to ancient Greek images. The advantage of using the term affordance (as opposed to simply 'usage') is that it grants the object itself – its material, shape, and design – a greater significance within the human–object relationship. In choosing this term, we acknowledge a more reciprocal engagement between both entities.

The pins and pestles in my case studies are found to prominently lend themselves to such surprising and bloody uses. Both pins (περόνη, πόρπη)[8] and pestles (ὕπερον) were common objects in ancient Greek daily life, utilized chiefly by women. Both are human-made objects designed for a specific, mundane purpose: pins are dress fasteners, usually for the peplos, while pestles are a type of kitchen utensil employed in the grinding of hard material such as wheat. In section A, I will discuss the texts by Herodotus, Euripides' *Hecuba*, and other relevant texts in which groups of women attack with pins, while section B will be devoted to visual representations of women attacking with pestles.

One important caveat before proceeding: I do not mean to claim that all of these representations precisely reflect reality like a mirror. For several decades it has been acknowledged by scholars that the scenes decorating Athenian vases,[9] and similarly the scenes represented in Greek tragedies,[10] are creative constructs bearing a complex relationship to reality. We cannot assume a direct analogy between the images of those mythical violent women and the experience of actual fifth-century BCE women of ancient Greece because such representations offer an exclusively male perspective on the engagement of women with objects: they were very likely crafted by men for (the most part) a target male elite audience (an issue further elaborated below).[11] What I argue here is that an analysis of both

[8] There is some inconsistency in the translation of these words, which appear variously as pin, brooch-pin, and brooch (for the latter two see below in quotations). Here, I will adopt the word pin for the *perone* and *porpe*, while the word brooch will refer solely to the *fibula*.

[9] See, e.g., G. Ferrari, 'Myth and Genre on Athenian Vases', *Classical Antiquity* 22.1 (2003), 37–40; T. J. McNiven, 'Sex, Gender, and Sexuality', in T. J. Smith and D. Plantzos (eds.), *A Companion to Greek Art* (Chichester, 2012), 510–11.

[10] K. Dowden, 'Approaching Women through Myth: Vital Tool or Self-delusion?', in R. Hawley and B. Levick (eds.), *Women in Antiquity. New Assessments* (London and New York, 1995), 44–9.

[11] D. Williams, 'Women on Athenian Vases: Problems of Interpretation', in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit, 1993), 97, 105; E. Fantham, 'Women in Classical Athens: Heroines and Housewives', in E. Fantham, H. Foley, N. Kampen, S. Pomeroy, and H. Shapiro (eds.), *Women in the Classical World. Image and Text* (New York, 1995), 69–70, 74 (retrieved from <https://hdl-handle-net.rproxy.tau.ac.il/2027/heb.04283>, accessed 23 November 2022). On the subject of vases made by men for a target female audience,

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literary and visual representations of women using pins and pestles while applying the term 'affordance' as an interpretive tool allows us to uncover a fundamental aspect of the engagement of women with the objects surrounding them – at least as envisioned by the men who both created and consumed these works of art.

A: women attacking with pins

The topic of straight pins has been thoroughly dealt with by several scholars.[12] These items have been found in two main archaeological contexts: votive and mortuary. Pins have been discovered mostly in sanctuaries and less frequently in tombs, and date up until the Classical period and beyond. These objects are usually made of base metal, chiefly bronze or iron; other materials, such as precious metals (gold, silver), ivory, and bone, are very rare. They feature a tapering long shaft, pointed at one end and with a finial at the other, usually with a short shank. The finial's design ranges from a simple globular or disk-like shape to a more complex design (Figure 1), and the length of the shaft also varies considerably, from a few centimetres to up to forty centimetres.[13]

Pins are considered a jewellery item. The more elaborate ones were probably relatively costly and constitute a luxury item, denoting high status, but most pins were rather simple in terms of shape and material, and therefore mundane.[14] As opposed to some other jewellery items that are primarily ornamental, pins, regardless of the material from which

see L. H. Petersen, 'Divided Consciousness and Female Companionship: Reconstructing Female Subjectivity in Greek Vases', *Arethusa* 50 (1997), 37; S. Blundell and N. S. Sorkin Rabinowitz, 'Women's Bonds, Women's Pots: Adornment Scenes in Attic Vase-Painting', *Phoenix* 62.1/2 (2008), 116–17.

[12] T. J. Dunbabin, '῎Εχθρη παλαίη', *Annual of the British School at Athens* 37 (1936–7), 85–8; P. Jacobsthal, *Greek Pins and their Connexions with Europe and Asia* (Oxford, 1956), 1–119; I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, 'Nadeln der frühhelladischen bis archaischen Zeit von der Peloponnes', *Prähistorische Bronzefunde* XIII, 8 (München, 1984), 208–95; M. M. Lee, *Body, Dress, and Identity in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 2015) 128–29; C. Brøns, *Gods and Garments. Textiles in Greek Sanctuaries in the 7th to the 1st Centuries BC* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 2017), 474–84.

[13] Jacobsthal (n. 12), 87–92.

[14] D. Williams, and J. Ogden, *Greek Gold. Jewellery of the Classical World* (London, 1994), 33; J. Boardman, 'The Archaeology of Jewelry', in A. Calinescu (ed.), *Ancient Jewelry & Archaeology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996), 4. See also B. Sparkes, 'Luxury items', *G & R* 57 (2010), 77, 83.

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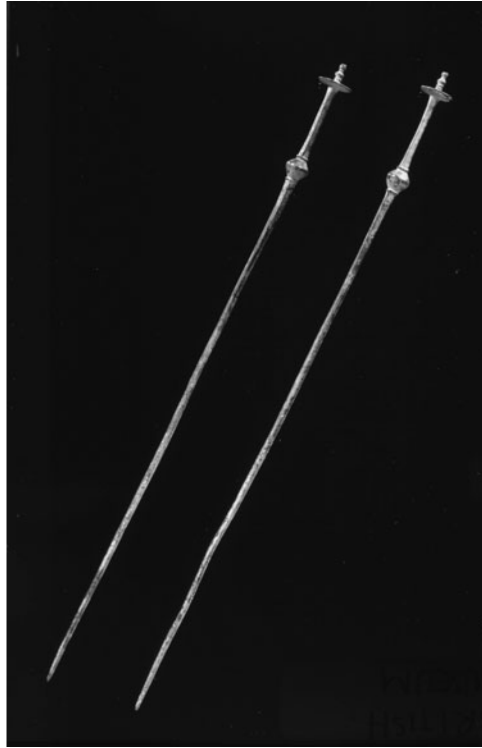

Figure 1. A pair of Geometric bronze pins. London, The British Museum, 1927,0412.6. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

they are made, are first and foremost objects designed for practical use. They are thus simultaneously both utilitarian and decorative.[15]

The relatively few pins depicted on vases are usually rendered as the simple type: with a thin shaft and a globular or disk-shaped finial.[16] Pins first appear in visual representations decorating Attic vases on the François vase, dating to ca. 570 BCE.[17] There, several women wear pins as the means to fasten their peplos (Figure 2).[18] They are also

[15] Brøns (n. 12), 474–5.
[16] For a list of the vases, see Jacobsthal (n. 12), 106–9.
[17] Brøns (n. 12), 63–7.
[18] Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco, 4209. *ARV* 76.1, 682; *Para* 29; *Add*² 21; *BAPD* 300000. From Chiusi, Italy.

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Figure 2. Attic black-figure volute krater (detail of the François Vase), signed by the potter Ergotimos and the painter Kleitias, ca. 570 BCE. Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco, 4209. © Steven Zucker, Smarthistory. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

shown on red-figure vases, as for example, on the calyx krater housed in the British Museum, where we see Pandora wearing a peplos secured with two pins (Figure 3).[19] It would seem that vase painters did not generally depict pins on a regular basis; and when they did, they showed little interest in the decorative aspect of the pin.[20]

Herodotus and the pins of the Athenian women

In his fifth book, Herodotus tells us a story of an event that took place after the Athenian warriors suffered a decisive defeat in the Battle of Aegina. A lone survivor makes his way home, only to meet a startling and grisly demise at the hands of his own womenfolk:

κομισθεὶς ἄρα ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας ἀπήγγελλε τὸ πάθος: πυθομένας δὲ τὰς γυναῖκας τῶν ἐπ' Αἴγιναν στρατευσαμένων ἀνδρῶν, δεινόν τι ποιησαμένας κεῖνον μοῦνον ἐξ ἁπάντων σωθῆναι, πέριξ τὸν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτον λαβούσας καὶ κεντεύσας τῇσι περόνῃσι τῶν

[19] London, British Museum, E467. *ARV²* 601.23; *Add* 130; *Add²* 226; *BAPD* 206955. From Altamura, Italy. Webpage <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1856-1213-1>, accessed 23 November 2022.

[20] Jacobsthal (n. 12), 110.

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Figure 3. Attic red-figure calyx krater (detail), attributed to the Niobid painter, 460–50 BCE. London, The British Museum, E467. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

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ἱματίων εἰρωτᾶν ἑκάστην αὐτέων ὅκου εἴη ὁ ἑωυτῆς ἀνήρ. καὶ τοῦτον μὲν οὕτω διαφθαρῆναι, Ἀθηναίοισι δὲ ἔτι τοῦ πάθεος δεινότερόν τι δόξαι εἶναι τὸ τῶν γυναικῶν ἔργον. ἄλλῳ μὲν δὴ οὐκ ἔχειν ὅτεῳ ζημιώσωσι τὰς γυναῖκας, τὴν δὲ ἐσθῆτα μετέβαλον αὐτέων ἐς τὴν Ἰάδα: ἐφόρεον γὰρ δὴ πρὸ τοῦ αἱ τῶν Ἀθηναίων γυναῖκες ἐσθῆτα Δωρίδα, τῇ Κορινθίῃ παραπλησιωτάτην: μετέβαλον ὦν ἐς τὸν λίνεον κιθῶνα, ἵνα δὴ περόνῃσι μὴ χρέωνται.

It would seem that he made his way to Athens and told of the mishap; and when this was known (it is said) to the wives of the men who had gone to attack Aegina, they were very wroth that he alone should be safe out of all, and they gathered round him and stabbed him with the brooch-pins (περόνῃσι) of their garments, each asking him 'where her man was'. Thus was this man done to death; and this deed of their women seemed to the Athenians to be yet more dreadful than their misfortune. They could find, it is said, no other way to punish the women; but they changed their dress to the Ionian fashion; for till then the Athenian women had worn Dorian dress, very like to the Corinthian; it was changed, therefore, to the linen tunic, that so they might have no brooch-pins to use. (5.87–88)[21]

This anecdote is usually taken as an etiological story explaining the change in women's dress – from the Doric peplos to the Ionic *chiton* and *himation* – that occurred during the late sixth century BCE, although the problematics of conceiving it as a straightforward explanation is acknowledged by various scholars.[22] Almost forty years ago, Ian Jenkins sought to interpret the story told by Herodotus not as a historical explanation for the actual sartorial change but rather as revealing the fear evinced by the Greek male of female aggression and his 'unconscious desire to disarm women from their secret weapon', and thus to tighten male domination over the opposite sex.[23] Whereas Jenkins focuses on the penalty imposed on the women and the men's motivation, I wish to draw our attention to a different aspect of the story: the relationship between the women and their pins.

The story told by Herodotus initially presents the canonical affordance of the pins: they hold together the two sides of the peplos. This is the purpose of the pin; its shape and the material from which it is made support this intended, expected usage. However, as the story continues, there is an unexpected twist: the pins are turned into a deadly weapon. The pin's form as a pointed stick and the material

[21] Translation: A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical, 1920.

[22] I. Jenkins, 'Dressed to Kill', *Omnibus* 5 (1983), 29; Brøns (n. 12), 62; Lee (n. 12), 100–2, 130–1.

[23] Jenkins (n. 22), 32. See also E. C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus. Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* (New York, 1985), 379.

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from which it was usually made – metal – are the properties that afford this usage perfectly. Gripped by rage, grief, and frustration, the Athenian women seek to kill the lone male survivor. However, deprived of any normal weapon, they are compelled to exploit the affordances of the pin, the simple mundane object at their disposal. This act, deeply transgressive in its nature, is supported, and perhaps augmented, by this usage of the pin. It disturbs and erodes what the audience knows about pins and reveals the latent affordances of the object.

But Herodotus does not stop here. He continues to recount the outcome of the brutal attack, detailing the penalty imposed on the Athenian women. They were forced to change their clothing from the Dorian peplos to the Ionian *chiton*, a type of dress in which the pins have been replaced by brooches or buttons[24] – objects that explicitly lack the properties for becoming a deadly weapon. Although considered a trivial punishment,[25] it reveals a profound understanding on the part of the Athenian men regarding the connection between women, the objects in their environment, and their ability to appropriate these objects' affordances for potential action. The men cast a blow to the Athenian women in their soft underbelly, depriving them of any object that might be transformed into a future weapon.

This tale is commonly connected to another by Herodotus, also concerning an aggressive group of Athenian women.[26] Here, Herodotus (9.5) describes how an Athenian councillor named Lycidas was willing to accept an offer presented to the council at Salamis and surrender to the enemy kingdom of Persia. This aroused fierce anger on the part of the Athenians attending the council and others, and they made a ring around him and stoned him to death. Upon hearing of the incident, the equally enraged local Athenian women proceeded en masse to Lycidas' house, where they mercilessly stoned to death his wife and children.

Notwithstanding the superficial similarity, in being a crime committed spontaneously by a group of women, this story actually differs from the first in several key ways. Firstly, in the latter story, the killing object is stones. Stones are natural and neutral objects, not

[24] Although the brooch does bear a pointed rod of sorts, it is a rather short one, and its design hampers its usage as a deadly weapon.

[25] C. Dewland, 'Women and Culture in Herodotus' Histories', *Women's Studies* 8 (1981), 100.

[26] *Ibid.*, 100; E. M. Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society. Volume 2, Ancient Greece* (New York, 2005), 88.

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made for any purpose,[27] and thus lack any canonical affordance per se. However, it seems that stones do have some normative usages, and the practice of stoning is one of them. In addition, in this story, the Athenian women emulate or complement the men's actions. They adopt the same killing object and method, essentially serving as a proxy to Lycidas' male murderers by stoning their peer, his wife, along with the children. Their action is certainly violent, but it is coordinated with the act of their men, and perhaps in that respect may be considered normative. This story stands in stark contrast to that of the pins: there, the women not only depart from the objects used by their menfolk for killing (weapons of battle), they also perform the action upon the opposite sex (a man).[28] One final distinction between the two stories, as told by Herodotus, lies in the fact that both violent actions were conceived differently *post factum*: while the Athenian women using their pins received punishment, the Athenian women who used stones did not. The difference in treatment evidently derives from whether the women overturned, or on the contrary aligned with, the men's values.

Hecuba and the Trojan women

An equivalent story – though this time entirely mythical in nature – is told by Euripides in the tragedy *Hecuba* (produced 424 BCE). The playwright unfolds the saga that occurs after Polymestor, king of Thrace, violated the rules of hospitality by murdering Polydorus, youngest son of the Trojan queen Hecuba, who had come under his ostensible protection. In the play, Hecuba's female attendants take revenge by in turn murdering Polymestor's children, and, moreover, blinding him (lines 1145–71). They do so by first enticing Polymestor and his sons into their tent on false pretexts and then, in the course of an innocent conversation, succeeding in subtly disarming Polymestor and removing his sons from his proximity. With Polymestor now unable to protect either his sons and himself, the Trojan women swiftly take

[27] Natural objects, as opposed to human-made objects, are usually considered to be in a different category, affecting but not affected by humans. See M. B. Schiffer, *The Material Life of Human Beings. Artifacts, Behavior, and Communication* (London and New York, 1999), 12–13; Knappett (n. 6), 58–60; I. Hodder 'Human-Thing Entanglement: Towards an Integrated Archaeological Perspective', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17 (2011), 155.

[28] Dewland ([n. 25], 123) lists other stories told by Herodotus in which women act together. The story about the stoning is part of section IIA1, 'Activities complementary to male activities'. The story about the murder with pins is part of section IIA2 'Independent of male control'.

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violent action, implementing their vengeance in two stages: killing Polymestor's children with swords they had concealed in their peploi (line 1161) and then blinding him by means of their pins (line 1170, πόρπας).[29]

Here, too, the violent action is performed by a group of women. In their planned attack, the Trojan women use the pin to blind Polymestor, a usage that falls beyond its canonical affordance, though directly based on its material features. The climactic scene presents the Trojan women as active and initiating, in gaining access to real weapons and in using the pins that are normally attached to their peploi. Unlike the Athenian women described above, the Trojan women actually have normative weapons – swords – in their hands and have already employed them. Yet, eschewing these, and the option of simply killing Polymestor, they deliberately choose to wield pins to carry out a further bloody and shocking deed. The audience has, throughout the play, seen the pins in the attendants' costume, thus witnessing the pin in its ongoing normative usage.[30] However, when Polymestor reappears on the stage, shocking the audience with his bleeding eyes, the audience is confronted with the results of the transgressive usage of the pins. Throughout the passage Euripides emphasizes again and again the sense of touch. The women use their hands to hold, pass, seize, dandle, take, yet for the blinding of Polymestor they use their pins, which thereby become a material extension to their bodies. The material properties of the pins afford these to become an object for blinding; and the revenge of the Trojan women is embodied in these mundane objects, which they wield intentionally and dramatically.

Recently, several scholars have dealt with the issue of costuming in the play. C. W. Marshall has argued that Euripides created a link between three dramatic scenes – the sacrifice of Polyxena, the Sack of Troy, and the blinding of Polymestor – not through verbal recurrences alone but also by means of the dresses they wear.[31] Luigi Battezzato has gone further, suggesting that the dresses in the Sack of Troy scene and those in the Polymestor scene are essentially one and the same.[32] Yet,

[29] For an interpretation of that scene and its connection to other blinding stories, see C. Segal, 'Violence and the Other: Greek, Female, and Barbarian in Euripides' Hecuba', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 120 (1990), 119 ff. See below for further discussion of other blinding stories.

[30] C. W. Marshall, 'The Costume of Hecuba's Attendants', *Acta Classica* 44 (2001), 128.

[31] *Ibid.*, 133 ff. For a further link between the two latter scenes, see A. Shirazi, 'The Other Side of the Mirror: Reflection and Reversal in Euripides' Hecuba', in Telò and Mueller (n. 1), 108.

[32] L. Battezzato, 'Euripides and Tragic Theatre in the Late Fifth Century', *Illinois Classical Studies* 24/25 (1999–2000), 361–2; *ibid.*, *Hecuba* (Cambridge, 2018), 199–200.

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in fact, the scenes contrast starkly. In the Sack of Troy scene, the Trojan women are helpless and in a state of absolute surrender to their lot (lines 923–30) – although they have pins at their disposal, they do not use them to avoid their terrible fate. The attendants of Hecuba, on the other hand, act in the reverse fashion, taking things into their own hands. Thus, these scenes present two extreme poles of female behaviour dictated by their emotional state: avoiding action when in despair and taking action when feeling determined. The determination exhibited by the Trojan women in the tent of Polymestor, including the brutal usage of the pins based on their ability to perceive their affordances, is powered and fuelled by their sense of revenge and anger.

There are a few blinding stories that come to mind as immediate comparison cases to the story of Polymestor.[33] I will now discuss three examples that shed light on the issue of human–object relations and the concept of affordance in general.

The first blinding story to note is mentioned in brief by Sophocles in the tragedy *Antigone* (produced ca. 442 BCE), when the chorus recounts a series of exempla to Antigone's fate. In lines 966–76 we learn that Eidothea, Phineus' second wife (not named in the tragedy), blinds her two stepsons 'by means of bloody hands and shuttle-point' (ὑφ᾽ αἱματηραῖς χείρεσσι καὶ κερκίδων ἀκμαῖσιν). Here, the object for the execution of the blinding is a domestic weaving tool, the *kerkis*. Probably best translated as 'pin beater', it was a very sharp object used by women as they wove, and no doubt highly accessible.[34] The second story of interest, and perhaps a more famous one, is the blinding of Oedipus, as recounted in another Sophoclean tragedy, *Oedipus the King* (produced 429 BCE). Here, we see that, in stark contrast to other incidents of blinding, Oedipus' blinding is carried out by his own hand.[35] His use of the golden pins (χρυσηλάτους περόνας) belonging to his dead wife to do so (lines 1237–84) creates a close parallel with the story of the blinding of Polymestor by Hecuba's female attendants, in that respect at least. This pair of precious adornment

[33] A. Tatti-Gartziou, 'Blindness as Punishment', in M. Christopoulos, E. D. Karakantza, and O. Levaniouk (eds.), *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion* (Lanham, 2010), 183–6. The most relevant section to our discussion is blinding in the framework of the *oikos*.

[34] For the *kerkis*, see. S. T. Edmunds, 'Picturing Homeric Weaving', in *Donum natalicum digitaliter confectum Gregorio Nagy septuagenario a discipulis collegis familiaribus oblatum* (Center for Hellenic Studies Online Publications, 2012), paragraphs 40–51, <https://chs.harvard.edu/susan-t-edmunds-picturing-homeric-weaving/>, accessed 25 November 2022.

[35] On the sexual aspect of the deed, see G. Devereux, 'The Self-Blinding of Oidipous in Sophokles: Oidipous Tyrannos', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 93 (1973), 48–9.

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objects, denoting the status and wealth of Jocasta, is suddenly transformed into a dreadful weapon. In a manner similar to that of the women discussed above, Oedipus perceives the latent affordances of the pin – for like them, he does not have anything else to hand. The connection between the sword and the pins recalls the usage of swords and pins by the Trojan women in *Hecuba*. Both link a proper masculine weapon with a common feminine object that has been transformed into a dangerous one. In *Hecuba*, the access of the women to swords emphasizes their power. By contrast, the fact that Oedipus lacks access to the normative male weapon and is reduced to using his wife's pins only serves to highlight his helpless, desperate situation.

In both of the above examples, we see mundane, domestic objects being transformed into a blinding implement, precisely because of their specific material and formal properties. It goes without saying that Eidothea's pin beater and Jocasta's pins were not designed to be blinding implements. Rather, their latent affordances are perceived by Eidothea and Oedipus respectively, who take advantage of these to pursue their goal, transforming them into an efficient blinding tool.

A similar perception of affordances, but with a rather different type of object, takes place in the third story, the blinding of Polyphemus, recounted both by Homer in the ninth book of the *Odyssey* (lines 318–27) and in the only surviving satyr play, *Cyclops* by Euripides (lines 455–9, produced ca. 408 BCE). Although differing in some details, both share the same blinding implement: a heavy beam of olive wood, found by Odysseus and manipulated by him (and by his companions, in the case of Homer) to suit his/their needs. The most important modification is the sharpening of its edge and its burning to harden it. Odysseus shows a proactive and creative spirit in taking a natural object and altering it to fit his design, and thus making a repurposed object. As opposed to pin beaters or pins, the tool chosen by Odysseus is only ever used for blinding, not for any other purpose. This case puts us in somewhat different territory in terms of objects and affordances than that discussed until now, and I will further explore this issue below.

Summary of section A

In the two tales I have spotlighted, the Athenian and the Trojan captive women both perceive the affordances of the pin and take advantage of the material properties of that routine object to commit a dreadful deed. As an item of jewellery adorning their dress, the pin was always

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carried on the body, available and ready for use. While the former group act on the spur of the moment and the latter in a calculated manner, the act itself is the same. The intentions of the women, their needs and their goals, are met by the latent affordances of the pin. The result is an aggressive act supported and perhaps augmented by the object in use. The image created is shocking: the once aesthetically pleasing shining metal object is now stained red with blood. The mundane pin undergoes a defamiliarization, compelling the audience to acknowledge that it has latent affordances – hidden layers – that may surface in certain situations.

It is important to note that the capacity to perceive affordances is commonplace and certainly not confined to women: the self-blinding of Oedipus by means of his wife's pins is an immediate example. Affordances lie in every object, surfacing when needs and intentions intersect with material properties. Yet, when it appears in the context of women, it is more laden with significances, due to the fact that the authors of the texts and, for the most part, the audience are male and thus the male gaze is ipso facto represented. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that women were also exposed to these stories.[36] Several questions come to mind, and I will address them later.

B: women attacking with pestles

The pestle was a common kitchen utensil used in conjunction with a mortar,[37] mainly for hulling grain or for pounding other substances.[38] It was a rather large implement and usually made of wood, and therefore is not preserved in archaeological excavations.[39] It could be used in either domestic or cultic contexts, as is evident from the rather few extant visual representations. For example, on a black-figure Boeotian skyphos we see

[36] For a brief summary of the debate on the question of whether women attended the Greek theatre or not, see V. Bers, 'Audiences at the Greek Tragic Plays', in H. M. Roisman (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Greek Tragedy* (Malden and Oxford, 2013), 2. In the specific case of Herodotus, however, we simply have no way to tell.

[37] There are two pairs of words in Greek that refer to rubbing and pounding raw materials. I focus here only on one pair – *holmos* and *hyperon*. See B. Sparkes, 'The Greek Kitchen', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 82 (1962), 125; J. Neils, 'Kitchen or Cult? Women with Mortars and Pestles', in S. Keay and S. Moser (eds.), *Greek Art in View. Essays in Honour of Brian Sparkes* (Oxford, 2004), 61, n. 7; A. Villing, 'The Daily Grind of Ancient Greece: Mortars and Mortaria between Symbol and Reality', in A. Tsingarida (ed.), *Shapes and Uses of Greek Vases 7th-4th Centuries BC* (Brussels, 2009), 319–22.

[38] Sparkes (n. 37), 126.

[39] Villing (n. 37), 323.

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two women working together in coordination, with two long pestles in a tall mortar,[40] where the domestic context of the scene is confirmed by the presence of another woman holding a spindle.[41] Another scene decorates a *dinos*, perhaps painted by an east Greek painter working in Etruria, housed in Boston and dating to ca. 530 BCE.[42] In the centre of the composition, a young, clothed woman and a naked youth are shown working together in coordination, using two long pestles in a tall mortar. An *auloi* player is standing to the left, perhaps setting the rhythm for their pounding. A procession of five naked youths approaches, one playing *auloi* and the others holding various objects in their hands: jugs, a bowl, and a net. The scholarly consensus is that this is a cult scene, an interpretation further confirmed by the depiction of a tripod topped with a bowl.[43] Although different in context, both scenes essentially present the canonical affordance of the pestle and its normative usage. Even if the final product (bread versus religious cake) and the sphere (domestic versus cultic) differ, the action is based on the canonical affordance and therefore is actually the same.

However, the pestle has another, non-normative, use as an offensive tool. This use is apparent in three principal mythological stories of ancient Greece: (1) Herakles in the house of Nereus; (2) the *Ilioupersis*; and (3) Orpheus and the Thracian women.[44]

Herakles in the house of Nereus

The first depiction of a pestle-wielding woman is seen on an Attic pelike housed in Munich (Figure 4).[45] The pelike is attributed to Myson and is dated ca. 490 BCE. On one side we see the hero Herakles wrecking the house of Nereus, the sea deity. Using Poseidon's trident, Herakles smashes the contents of the house, making a terrible mess: we see a cup, an oinochoe, and an amphora overturned

[40] The Paul and Alexandra Canellopoulos collection, Athens, 384. Webpage: <https://pacf.gr/en/portfolio-item/black-figured-boeotian-skyphos-kotyle/>, accessed 23 November 2022.

[41] For a detailed discussion, see J. -J. Maffre, 'Collection Paul Canellopoulos: les Vases', *BCH* 99.1 (1975), 467–76, figs. 29, 30. For a discussion of various vases, see Neils (n. 37), 54–9.

[42] Boston, Museum of Fine Art, 13.205. Webpage: <https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/bowl-dinos-with-symposium-scene-154429>, accessed 23 November 2022.

[43] Neils (n. 37), 59; Villing (n. 37), 326–7.

[44] H. G. Buchholz, 'Mörsersymbolik', *Acta Praehistorica et Archaeologica* 7/8 (1976/7), 261 ff.

[45] Munich, Antikensammlungen, 8762. *ARV*² 133.21; *Add*² 201; *BAPD* 275132. See N. Icard-Gianolio and A. -V. Szabados, 'Nereides', *LIMC* 6 (Zurich, 1992), 804, no. 267; L. Giuliani, *Image and Myth. A History of Pictorial Narration in Greek Art* (Chicago, 2013), 187–92.

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Figure 4. Attic red-figure pelike attributed to Myson. Munich, Antikensammlungen, 8762. © MatthiasKabel. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

onto the floor. His club, unused, is depicted in front of him. On the other side, either Nereus' wife Doris or one of their daughters is portrayed running while clutching a large pestle horizontally in her hands. She is using the pestle, a household object, as a weapon. As a long, solid, heavy object, its physical properties make it suitable for attacking Herakles, unlike the ceramic vases depicted on the other side of the pelike. Perhaps Myson's choice of this object stems from its correlation to the club, as both share similar physical traits in being a long, solid, heavy object. It may be conceived as the female, domestic version of the club. This might help to explain why this latent affordance is realized in this particular situation.

The Ilioupersis

The second story featuring women using pestles as a weapon is the *Ilioupersis*, in which the Trojan women fight for their lives against the

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Greeks. The *Ilioupersis* has a long iconographic tradition in Greek art. It first appears on a relief *pithos* from Mykonos, and then in Attic ware[46] – a few examples in black-figure technique and many more in red-figure technique. The iconic scenes that build the core of the *Ilioupersis* are Neoptolemos' murder of Priam on the altar, the rape of Cassandra, and Menelaus' recovery of Helen. In most cases, the depiction of the *Ilioupersis* is limited to a few scenes, but we do find some vases dating 500–480 BCE that are decorated with rich iconography. These include four vases showing a woman using a pestle as offensive weaponry. I will now discuss these vases in detail.

A good starting point is an Attic cup by the Brygos painter. It is housed in the Louvre and dated to ca. 490–80 BCE.[47] On one side we have one of the iconic scenes of the *Ilioupersis* – the murder of Priam, king of Troy, by the Greek warrior Neoptolemos. Priam sits on the altar of Zeus Herkeios, Guardian of the House. He stretches out his hands, pleading for mercy from Neoptolemos, who is about to kill him using the corpse of the king's own grandson, Astyanax.[48] To the left, a warrior named Akamas leads a docile Polyxena (youngest daughter of Priam) to be sacrificed as an appeasement offering to the gods. On the other side (Figure 5) we see Greeks attacking Trojans. In the centre of the composition, a Greek warrior is about to strike a fallen Trojan warrior, and to the left another Greek is killing another Trojan. In between the two, a Trojan woman is seen fleeing, while on the right a woman, labelled Andromache, brandishes a large pestle above her head, about to strike the warrior in front of her. She is trying to protect the boy, labelled Astyanax, her son, who flees to the right. The proactive nature of Andromache's move to attack the Greek warrior is emphasized by the contrast with the fleeing helpless woman (Cassandra?). The object with which Andromache protects both herself and her son is a pestle. By adding the name of the object used by Andromache, hυπερ[o]ς, the Brygos painter creates a univalent

[46] A. Cambitoglou, *The Brygos Painter* (Sydney, 1968), 30; D. Castriota, *Myth, Ethos, and Actuality.:Official Art in Fifth-Century BC Athens* (Madison, 1992), 96–9, 165–74; M. J. Anderson, *The Fall of Troy in Early Greek Poetry and Art* (Oxford, 1997), 179–245; M. Pipili, 'Ilioupersis', *LIMC* 8 (Zurich, 1997), 651–3; Giuliani (n. 45), 57–70, 176–86.

[47] Paris, Musée du Louvre, G152. *ARV* 245.1; *ARV²* 369.1, 398, 1649; *Para* 365; *Add* 111; *Add²* 224; *BAPD* 203900. From Vulci, Italy. Webpage: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010270046>, accessed 23 November 2022.

[48] Cambitoglou (n. 46), 30; O. Touchefeu, 'Astyanax', *LIMC* 1 (Zurich, 1982), 932, no. 18; Anderson (n. 46), 229; Pipili (n. 46), 652, no. 8.

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Figure 5. Attic red-figure cup attributed to the Brygos painter, 490–80 BCE. Paris, Musée du Louvre, G152. © 2019 RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Stéphane Maréchalle.

connection between object and word.[49] It signifies the domestic environment where the fight transpires and is also a sign of the sudden and harsh situation in which Andromache finds herself. Deprived of access to any normal weapons, she snatches an object from her vicinity, perceives the latent affordance hidden in its material properties, and transforms it into a weapon. In doing so, Andromache wrenches the pestle out of its normative usage and uses it transgressively. The familiar domestic space, along with the objects that construct it, becomes the source of the violent action. In the eyes of the viewer, the familiar is defamiliarized. The scene painted near the cup's other handle, on a diagonal axis, is complementary to this one. When Neoptolemos uses Astyanax's corpse as a weapon to murder Priam, the corpse is objectified and used exceptionally, in a manner that extends far beyond any social norm. Here, too, the transgressive nature of the act is augmented by the shocking usage of a dead body as a weapon.

The image in the *Ilioupersis* of a Trojan woman using a pestle for defence recurs in the famous Vivenzio Attic hydria by the Kleophrades painter.[50] The frieze decorating the shoulder of the hydria features five scenes. In one, an anonymous woman is attacking a fallen Greek warrior standing just behind Neoptolemos; she is about to hurl a

[49] A few scholars, however, argue that 'hυπερ[ο]ς' is the name of the Greek warrior attacking Andromache (e.g. Cambitoglou [n. 46], 32).

[50] Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 81699. *ARV* 126.66; *ARV²* 189.74, 1632; *Para* 341; *Add* 94; *Add²* 189; *BAPD* 201724. From Nola, Italy. Webpage: <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/tools/pottery/painters/keypieces/redfigure/kleophrades.htm>, accessed 23 November 2022.

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pestle at him. Here, too, her proactive action stands out in comparison to the other women depicted in the scene, i.e. Cassandra, who stands, practically naked, grasping the statue of Athena, and four other women who sit hunched over, doing nothing to defend themselves. The presence of the altar of Zeus and the pestle point to the domestic context of these scenes.

A third example is an Attic column krater housed in the Villa Giulia museum and attributed to the Tyszkiewicz painter, dated to 490–80 BCE.[51] On side B we see a Greek warrior advancing leftwards, about to draw his sword. On the left, a woman wields a large pestle above her head, while on the right a second woman raises her hands helplessly, fleeing rightwards. Here too the proactive action is paired with, and reinforced by, the presence of a helpless woman.

The fourth and final example, an Attic cup by Onesimos, allows us to expand the discussion about females and objects. Signed by Euphronios as potter and housed today in Rome,[52] the cup is dated to 500–490 BCE.[53] The tondo and the frieze encircling it are decorated with *Ilioupersis* scenes, and the entire interior of the cup is also devoted to this myth.[54] Onesimos included the most iconic scenes, supplementing these with various others to create an elaborate iconography. Most interesting for our purposes is two images indicating the use of the pestle as a weapon by women. The first image, in the frieze, shows the same Trojan woman as mentioned above. Located this time between the rape of Cassandra and the rescue of Aithra, the woman strikes with a pestle at the helmet of the warrior confronting her, labelled Sthenelos.[55] In the tondo, Onesimos depicts a second pestle, located in front of the altar of Zeus Herkeios. We can be fairly sure that this had been very recently used by Polyxena, who, identified by inscription, is now seen standing behind the altar and tearing at her hair, after she tried in vain to defend herself and perhaps also her father. However, for Onesimos, the pestle is not the only domestic object used as a weapon, for he also depicts here another Trojan woman using an

[51] Rome, Villa Giulia museum, 3578. *ARV*[2] 290.9, *Add*[2] 210, *BAPD* 202641. From Falerii, Italy.

[52] Rome, Villa Giulia museum, 121110. *BAPD* 13363. From Cerveteri, Italy.

[53] D. Williams, 'Onesimos and the Getty Iliupersis', *Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum* 5 (1991), 47.

[54] *Ibid.*, 47–61; M. J. Anderson, 'Onesimos and the Interpretation of Ilioupersis Iconography', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 (1995), 130–5; Anderson (n. 46), 234–45.

[55] Photo: Williams (n. 53), 52, Fig. 8g.

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axe. While the axe is a tool used in the context of metalwork, it is also a domestic implement with many uses around the home. Thus, we see that not one but several women in the Onesimos cup are shown trying to defend themselves by means of objects in their immediate vicinity. They exploit the physical features of these objects, wrench them from their canonical affordance and normative usage, and turn them into weapons.

Though the number of female pestle wielders in these *Ilioupersis* vase scenes is not high, pointing to the fact that the pestle element never became an integral part of the iconic scenes that build the core of the story,[56] their presence is dramatic and noticeable, and important messages are conveyed through them. Firstly, they exemplify some women's proactivity in stark contrast with other women's passivity. Secondly – and arguably even more than the use of objects such as axes would convey – they speak of women's resourcefulness and recourse to using whatever lies at hand when dire need dictates.

The death of Orpheus

The third, and by far the most elaborate, story in which we see women using pestles as a weapon is that of the death of Orpheus. This tale is also the clear leader, out of all the mythological stories featured on vases, when considering the motif of women wielding pestles.

Several scholars have listed and categorized the existing vases depicting this story and dealt with their iconography.[57] The scene of Orpheus' death at the hands of Thracian women (other variants suggesting other causes of Orpheus' death exist) became a popular theme on Athenian red-figure vases ca. 490 BCE and remained so until the end of the century. On several of the vases depicting this scene we see, once again, women using a pestle as a weapon. An Attic stamnos now in Basel is a good example.[58] It is attributed to the Dokimasia painter and dated to 470 BCE (Figure 6).[59] On one

[56] *Ibid.*, 52.

[57] For example, F. Lissarrague, 'Orphée mis à mort', *Musica e Storia* 2 (1994), 271 ff.; M. -X. Garezou, 'Orpheus', *LIMC* 7 (Zurich,1994), 84–8, nos. 25–59 (sections IV C, D, E, F), 100–1.

[58] Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, BS1411. *ARV²* 1652; *Para* 373.34TER; *Add²* 234; *BAPD* 275231. From Vulci, Italy.

[59] Garezou (n. 57), 86, no. 35.

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Figure 6. Attic red-figure stamnos attributed to the Dokimasia painter, 470 BCE. Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig, BS1411. © ArchaiOptix. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence.

side to the right we see Orpheus kneeling on the ground, menacingly threatened by several Thracian woman. The first holds him from behind, gripping a sword at his neck. Behind her stands a second woman, brandishing a large pestle above her head. In front of them, to the right, a woman is about to clout Orpheus with a large rock, while yet another woman behind her is seen to be holding, again, a pestle. Another object of interest is the long, vertical roasting spit pinned through Orpheus' leg, a detail familiar from hunting scenes but unusual in scenes of battle. The scene continues on the other side of the stamnos, where three women run from left to right – the first raising a roasting spit, the second a stone, and the third an axe. Holding the stamnos by the right handle, the viewer can see the full array of weapons.

Other items shown frequently as being wielded by the Thracian women are spears and sickles. On a second Attic stamnos housed in

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the Louvre,[60] attributed to Hermonax and also dating to 470 BCE,[61] six Thracian women are shown attacking Orpheus. On one side the helpless musician is flanked by two women, one piercing him with a roasting spit, the other about to hurl a rock at him. A third woman, approaching from the left, is brandishing a stone. On the other side we encounter three other woman, wielding a double axe, a sickle, and a spear respectively. On at least one vase the Thracian women are using the *pelta*, a crescent-shaped shield typical to Thracian warriors.[62] Here, they also use a pestle, spears, and a stone. These scenes exemplify very clearly a consistent feature of the iconography of the death of Orpheus: the Thracian women always use a blend of assorted weaponry belonging to several spheres. Each scene contains a different mixture of weapons; no one type of weapon is obligatory. Diversity is the name of the game, and the visual juxtaposition of the various objects is what is important.

The violent attack by the Thracian women is clearly a premeditated one; they have not simply grabbed some domestic objects in the midst of either battle or a wild frenzy. Although the Thracians are sometimes considered to be maenads,[63] they do not act in the frenzied manner we would expect, nor show any identifiable signs of madness.[64] Since the act takes place in the countryside, as attested to by the trees and rocks depicted in the pictorial field of several of the scenes, it follows that they must have brought all of their improvised weapons – domestic and otherwise – with them. The planned nature of the attack is also supported by a scene decorating several vases in which we see the Thracian women standing alongside Thracian men and listening to Orpheus' music while already armed with their attacking objects.[65] An illustrative example is a hydria housed in Paris, where we see

[60] Paris, Musée du Louvre, G416. *ARV²* 484.17, 1655; *Para* 379; *Add* 121; *Add²* 247; *BAPD* 205400. From Nola, Italy. Webpage: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010270268>, accessed 23 November 2022.

[61] Garezou (n. 57), 86, no. 39.

[62] Princeton (NJ), The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1986.59A-D. *BAPD* 19146. Webpage: <https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/33124>, accessed 23 November 2022.

[63] T. J. McNiven, 'Behaving Like an Other: Telltale Gestures in Athenian Vase Painting', in B. Cohen (ed.), *Not the Classical Ideal. Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art* (Leiden, 2000), 84, n. 42; S. Brosch, J. D. Bennett, and W. Pirsig, 'Singing and Evil in Visual Art', *Folia Phoniatrica et Logopaedica* 57 (2005), 243.

[64] S. Burges Watson, 'Orpheus' Erotic Mysteries: Plato, Pederasty, and the Zagreus Myth in Phanocles F 1', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 57 (2014), 51.

[65] Garezou (n. 57), 85, nos. 25–7 (Category IV C).

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Orpheus sitting on a rock playing his lyre and flanked by a Thracian man, a satyr, and two women – one holding a spear and the other a large pestle.[66]

The most noteworthy point, however, is that the objects these women use form an intriguing blend of actual weapons, household objects, and natural objects. This blend, together with other iconographical elements in the scenes of the death of Orpheus, is a consistent feature in the depiction of the attack.[67] These weapons can be categorized according to three types of usages stemming from affordances: (a) spears and swords: designed as actual weapons, they are used according to their canonical affordance and normative usage; (b) pestles, axes, sickles, and roasting spits: though tightly connected to household, cultic, and agricultural activities,[68] their affordances deriving from their shape and material are exploited by the Thracian women to turn them into offensive objects, employed in non-normative usage; (c) rocks and stones: natural objects that have no affordances, but effectively afford killing all the same. Although rocks, stones, and branches are all considered to be primitive and wild weapons, usually wielded by Centaurs and the Minotaur,[69] here they serve as signs of the outdoor setting of the attack – and, no less importantly, they present the Thracian women as exploiting a wide range of objects to carry out their plan. In this specific context, rocks are neither wild nor primitive but rather an additional type of object used for a specific goal.

One final example related to Orpheus that merits discussion is an Attic cup now in Cincinnati, attributed to the Painter of Louvre G265, and dated to 480–70 BCE.[70] Here, nine Thracian women are shown attacking Orpheus. On one side, four of them flank him while he is in a state of collapse (Figure 7). The pair on the right hold spears, one piercing Orpheus' chest, and there is another peculiar object in his chest, pinned vertically into it, to which I will return momentarily. The woman on the immediate left is about to hurl a large rock at Orpheus, while her companion brandishes an object which seems identical to the

[66] Paris, Musée du Petit Palais, 319. *ARV*² 1112.4; *Add*² 330; *BAPD* 214705. From Nola, Italy.

[67] Lissarrague (n. 57), 278–9.

[68] *Ibid.*; F. Lissarrague, 'The Athenian Image of the Foreigner', in T. Harrison (ed.), *Greeks and Barbarians* (New York, 2002), 120–1.

[69] S. Muth, *Gewalt im Bild* (Berlin and New York, 2008), 28, 413–99.

[70] Cincinnati (OH), Art Museum, 1971.1. *ARV*² 416.2, 1655; *Add* 116; *Add*² 234; *BAPD* 204533.

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Figure 7. Attic red-figure cup attributed to the Painter of Louvre G265 (circle of the Brygos painter), ca. 480 BCE. © Cincinnati (OH), Art Museum, John J. Emery, William W. Taylor, Robert S. Dechant, and Israel and Caroline Wilson Endowments, 1971.1.

peculiar one just mentioned. On the other side, five other women are shown. The three on the right are gesturing towards the other side of the cup. Of these, the one on the extreme right carries a double axe and is striding towards Orpheus; the second from the right holds two spears and, though pointing them in Orpheus' direction, in fact seems to be walking away from him; and the third approaches Orpheus, raising a serrated sickle in her left hand. To the far left of this composition, two women converse, one gripping a double axe and the other a spit. Shifting our eyes to the tondo, we see two women to the left walking side by side and looking at each other. They bear a serrated sickle, a spear, and a large rock.

The scenes decorating the cup present the usual combination of objects: spears (actual weapons); axes, sickles, and a roasting spit (household objects); and rocks (natural objects). But the unusual object appearing in Orpheus' chest and possibly again on the left turns out to be difficult to identify. It resembles a stick with some slight bends in it and a pointed leaf-like edge. Ignoring the one on the left, Lissarrague calls the object in Orpheus's chest 'a strange wavy lance'

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and claims that its peculiarity marks the Thracian women as barbarians.[71] Susanne Muth and Carol Benson suggest that this object is a roasting spit,[72] and Benson also goes on to identify the object on the left as a spear. I disagree on both fronts. To me, the two objects seem identical in shape, and I would also question the categorization of the first object as a roasting spit. Spits, as seen on the other side of the cup, as well as on the stamnoi discussed above and on other vases featuring the death of Orpheus, are shaped very differently: they are straight, their width is fixed, and they bear a typical finial. I would suggest that they are both sticks, branches, sharpened at the end to make them adequate for piercing.[73] If this interpretation is correct, the Thracian women display even more initiative and creativity than we first imagined, much like Odysseus sharpening and burning the olive beam mentioned above. In taking a natural object and modifying it to suit their needs, they demonstrate a new level of sophistication: that of manipulating a natural object and transforming it into a human-made object specifically designed for a certain purpose. If so, we now have a fourth category of objects used by the Thracian women to the add to the three above, namely (d) a manipulated natural object. This object bolsters our understanding that the Thracian women's attack was far from spontaneous, but was rather carefully thought through and planned.[74]

[71] Lissarrague (n. 57), 278, 282. He compares the 'wavy spear' to a depiction decorating an Attic amphora signed by Smikros and housed in Berlin, dated to 510–500 BCE (*BAPD* 352401). There, a satyr labelled Stysippos is shown dancing while armed with a pelta and a similar 'wavy spear'.

[72] Muth (n. 69), 540–1; C. Benson ('Orpheus and the Thracian Women', in E. D. Reeder [ed.], *Pandora. Women in Classical Greece* [Baltimore, 1995], 394), is hesitant in her assertion about the identity of the object ('perhaps a meat spit').

[73] Recently, M. L. Catoni ('Images and Words, Invisible and Unspeakable', *Engramma* 150 [2017], <http://www.engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=3319>, section 2, accessed 23 November 2022) identified the object held by the satyr on the amphora by Smikros mentioned in n. 71 above as a 'spear – whose rod is made of a rough stick', which is similar to the identification I propose here. A. Kossatz-Deissmann ('Stysippos', *LIMC* 7 [Zurich, 1994], 817, no. 1) has also identified the object as a stick.

[74] One textual source reports the Thracian women as being, like the Athenian women in our very first story, punished for their actions. This source is late, though – a fragment attributed to Phanocles, a Hellenistic poet. In this lengthy fragment, the Thracian women kill Orpheus with bronze swords, and as a result of the attack, the Thracian men decide to tattoo their wives 'so that having on their flesh signs of dark blue, they would not forget their hateful murder'. See Burges Watson (n. 64), 59 ff.

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Summary of section B

The women depicted on these vases use the pestle (and other objects, in the case of the Thracian women) to perform violent actions. The latent affordances of the objects that enable killing suddenly surface within a specific and exceptional situation that catalyses the perception of these affordances by the women. The needs, abilities, and goals of these women intersect with the material properties and affordances of the objects in their vicinity, supporting and augmenting their actions, and embodying their proactivity, resourcefulness, and ability to kill and maim, as well as their fears and emotions. Even when the number of women with pestles is not high, and the pestle is not the dominant element in the scene, its presence conveys a significant message regarding women and objects alike.

A question applicable also to section A: what might be the response of a female viewer to such scenes? While the vases were painted by males and most likely destined for a male audience, we cannot rule out the significant possibility that various women might also have observed them at some point or another. A vase might be seen by chance in the storeroom, during the symposium, or while being transferred to and fro in the house. None of these require any intention to come into play.[75] An attempt to address this question has already been made by various scholars, primarily regarding scenes of female gatherings such as textile production, water fetching, bathing (by Petersen), or adornment scenes (by Blundell and Sorkin Rabinowitz). According to these scholars, those scenes might act as a locus for female subjectivity, where a woman may affirm past and present experiences of friendship, companionship, intimacy, and even erotic love, independent of the dominant male-constructed ideology. This notion is visually expressed in the way these females cooperate, look at and touch each other, and calmly converse.[76] However, the scenes pinpointed by these scholars differ from the corpus discussed in this paper in one key aspect: the latter involve extreme violence. As such, they (we would hope) would not reflect the actual experience of any female viewer.

Nonetheless, a close examination of the images, particularly those discussed in the section The death of Orpheus, reveals that in at least

[75] S. Lewis, 'Slaves as Viewers and Users of Athenian Pottery', *Hephaistos* 16/17 (1998/9), 74.
[76] Petersen (n. 11), 53, 65; Blundell and Sorkin Rabinowitz (n. 11), 122, 133.

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one case we find similarities to the scenes discussed by Petersen – namely on the Cincinnati cup, where several women are presented as exchanging looks, calmly walking side by side, conversing with each other, and undoubtedly acting together (a feature characteristic to all those scenes). In that respect, those images represent perhaps an extreme form of a feminine companionship. Women looking at those vases could perceive not only how their immediate environment might be exploited for certain ends, but also how powerful female companionship may be and what might be the result of such violent cooperation.

Conclusions

The case studies discussed above, derived from both vase paintings and literary texts, present groups of women who use pins and pestles (and indeed other objects) in ways that clearly fall not only beyond the canonical affordances of these objects but in fact beyond any normative usage, even in the broadest sense. At first glance, the various incidents might appear entirely unrelated to each other, or at most related to each other primarily on the typological level, but they in fact share a fascinating common thread in the relationship depicted between women and objects, whereby the women perceive the latent affordances of the objects surrounding them and successfully exploit their material properties for executing their goals.

The deliberately narrow focus here on women and objects has been adopted in order to make the point that the theory of affordances is an important tool in the study of antiquity, and in a way that can be encompassed in the scope of an article. This discussion is simply a start, based on specific examples, and an illustration of a direction of discourse that holds potential for far more scholarship and research.

The term affordance allows us a profound understanding of the nature of this relationship between women and objects, one that is shaped according to artistic conventions. The fact that there is no slippage from medium to medium, meaning that pins as weapons are presented only in literary sources while pestles as weapons are presented only in visual sources, hints to firm underlying conventions that come into play in each respective medium – and, in my view, makes these study cases complementary, two sides of the same coin. These study cases are also complementary in the way they present the power concealed within groups of women who act together for a common goal.

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It is perhaps unsurprising that the affordances that support usage deviating from the norm is most fully exposed in relation to women, for they lived under norms whose nature compelled deviation at times. Although women enjoyed a certain amount of mobility in the public sphere, their lives were quite restricted.[77] When in need of solutions under extreme and pressing circumstances, they naturally found these in their immediate environment. For both tragedians and vase painters, these stories provide an ideal fertile ground for presenting the topic of such subversive usage by women, with all that this implies in terms of the ancient Greek male gaze upon women – viewed as flexible, surprising, and threatening creatures.

The Greek male desire for domination is accompanied by a concomitant fear of female aggression which, even when officially disarmed, can be channelled via 'secret weapons', i.e. domestic objects in the vicinity.[78] Certainly, the Athenian women can be punished by being made to wear dresses that no longer contain pins; yet it would be impossible to eliminate all domestic items that might be used violently. A fundamental lack of control exists, and this might be rather terrifying to the men, if only on a subconscious level.

In the hands of the Athenian, Trojan, and Thracian women, as told and depicted throughout the Classical period by Athenian dramatists and painters, the latent affordances of mundane objects – objects that together make up the familiar environment, and generally remain unnoticed – become visible and substantial to the audience. The inanimate, solid stratum becomes flexible and elastic. Those pins and pestles, familiar from the real world of the viewers, are defamiliarized and become complex entities with hidden layers, just waiting for the right moment to be exposed. When thus exposed, these layers serve to illuminate the mind of the viewer with surprising new thoughts, connections, and comprehension.

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[77] E. D. Reeder, 'Women and Men in Classical Greece', in Reeder (n. 72), 29; N. Kaltsas and A. H. Shapiro, *Worshiping Women. Ritual and Reality in Classical Athens* (New York and Athens, 2008), 21; McNiven (n. 9), 515.

[78] Jenkins (n. 22), 32; Keuls (n. 23), 379.

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