

A New Look at the Mythological Representations of the Panagyurishte Gold Treasure, Bulgaria¹

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ABSTRACT

Of the nine gold vessels of the Panagyurishte treasure, discovered accidentally in December 1949 and dated to the second half of the 4th or the first part of the 3rd century BCE, three are significant for the present discussion: two *rhyta* and an amphora-*rhyton*. On the first *rhyton* is represented the Judgment of Paris. The second *rhyton* depicts Herakles fighting against the legendary Ceryneian hind and Theseus hunting the bull of Marathon. On the amphora-*rhyton*, a warlike scene is depicted. It seems plausible to consider that the three vessels are related to each other not only as part of a luxurious drinking set, but also as a cycle of close themes, forming a thematic and narrative link. Consequently, they may throw light upon the meaning of the warlike scene on the wall of the amphora-*rhyton*, namely the first abduction of Helen by Theseus and her liberation by the Dioscuri. In addition, the Judgment of Paris, depicted on the first *rhyton*, hints the second abduction of Helen by Paris, followed by the dramatic events of the Trojan War and its disastrous and tragic results.

Key words: Aphidna. Dioscuri. Helen. Herakles. Judgment of Paris. Korynetes. Theseus.

Una nueva mirada a las representaciones mitológicas del tesoro de oro de Panagyuriste, Bulgaria

RESUMEN

De los nueve vasos de oro del tesoro de Panagyurishte, descubierto accidentalmente en diciembre de 1949 y datado en la segunda mitad del siglo IV a.C., o en la primera del s. III a.C., tres son significativos para el presente trabajo: dos *rhyta* y un ánfora-*rhyton*. En el primer *rhyton* se representa el juicio de Paris; en el segundo aparece Hércules luchando con la fabulosa cierva de Cerinea y Teseo cazando el toro de Maratón. En el ánfora-*rhyton* se representa una escena militar. Parece plausible considerar que estos tres recipientes están relacionados entre sí no sólo por el hecho de formar parte de un servicio de bebida de lujo, sino también por representar un ciclo de temas próximos, que forman un conjunto temático y narrativo. En consecuencia, su consideración conjunta puede arrojar luz al respecto de la escena militar del ánfora-*rhyton*, en la que quizá figure el primer rapto de Helena por Teseo y su liberación por los Dióscuros. Además, el juicio de Paris, representado en el primer *rhyton*, apunta al segundo rapto de

¹ The present article was written following a re-examination of the mythological scenes represented on the vessels of the treasure, especially on the amphora-*rhyton*, carried out during a visit to Bulgaria in April 2013.

Helena por Paris, seguido por los dramáticos sucesos de la guerra de Troya y sus desastrosos y trágicos resultados.

Palabras clave: Aphidna. Dióscuros. Helena. Hércules. Juicio de Paris. Korynetes. Teseo.

Contents: 1. Description and Iconography. 2. Interpretation. 3. Summary.

1. Description and iconography

The Panagyurishte treasure, consisting of nine gold vessels, was discovered accidentally in December 1949 by workers who were digging clay for bricks (**Fig. 1**). The place where the vessels were found lies some 2 km south of Panagyurishte in Bulgaria.² Interestingly, and curiously, in the vicinity of the treasure there are no ruins of any noteworthy ancient site, nor any remains of a monumental building, villa or palace, which could perhaps have been connected with the treasure.³ The artifacts, dated to the second half of the 4th or early 3rd century BCE,⁴ are now on exhibition at the National Museum of History in Sofia.

Of the nine vessels of the Panagyurishte treasure, three are significant for the present discussion: two ornamented *rhyta* in the shape of animal heads (the first and second *rhyta*)⁵ and an amphora-*rhyton*.⁶

On the first *rhyton* (13.50 cm high, weight 674.60 grammes), images of Athena, Alexandros (Paris), Hera and Aphrodite appear together with their incised names in Greek letters (ΑΘΗΝΑ, ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ, ΗΡΑ, ΑΦΡΟΔΙΤΗ) (**Figs. 2-6**).⁷ Alexandros⁸ in the discussed scene is Paris, the second son of Priam and Hecuba, connected with the three aforementioned goddesses in Greek mythology, in the Judgment of Paris, in which he gained the most beautiful of women – Helen. This subject began to be represented in visual art from the mid- 7th century BCE onwards.⁹

The second *rhyton* (13 cm high, weight 689 grammes) represents two symmetrical groups,¹⁰ in which the figures are identified as Herakles fighting the legendary

² TSONCHEV 1954, 1056-1057; TSONCHEV 1955, 218-227; SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, 115-164; SIMON 1960, 3-29; VENEDIKOV 1961; ROUX 1964, 30-41; DEL MEDICO 1967-1968, 37-67; OVCHAROV 2003, 42-47; MINTCHEV 2006, 131-142; KISYOV n.d.; KITOV n.d.

³ VENEDIKOV 1961, 6.

⁴ See TSONCHEV 1954, 1056; TSONCHEV 1955, 226; HOFFMANN 1958, 121-141; SIMON 1960, 3ff.; VENEDIKOV 1961, 5 and n. 5; ROUX 1964, 30, n. 1; DEL MEDICO 1967-1968, 37.

⁵ VENEDIKOV 1961, 7-9, Figs. 2-8; KISYOV n.d., 12-15; KITOV n.d., Figs. 30-31 (on p. 23), 33-34 (on pp. 24-25), 36-40 (on pp. 26-28).

⁶ VENEDIKOV 1961, 14-16, Figs. 25-34; KISYOV n.d., 3, 6-9; KITOV n.d., Figs. 7-13 (on pp.11-14), 15 (on p. 15), 17-23 (on pp. 16-19).

⁷ SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, 129 (Abb. 2); SIMON 1960, 19 (Abb. 4); VENEDIKOV 1961, 7-8, Figs. 2-5; KISYOV n.d., 12-14; KITOV n.d., Figs. 30-31 (on p. 23), 33-34 (on pp. 24-25).

⁸ VENEDIKOV 1961, 8, Fig. 2; KISYOV n.d., 14; KITOV n.d., 23, Fig. 31.

⁹ See ROSE 1959, 106-107 and n. 17; CARPENTER 1991, 197-198, Ills. 290-294; DOWDEN 1994, 29; GANTZ 1996, 2, 567-571 (with literary and artistic sources).

¹⁰ See SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, 130 (Abb. 3); SIMON 1960, 21 (Abb. 5); VENEDIKOV 1961, 9, Figs. 6-8; KISYOV n.d., 15; KITOV n.d., Figs. 36-40 (on pp. 26-28).



Fig. 1. The Panagyurishte gold treasure (Kitov n.d., fig. 1).

Ceryneian hind,¹¹ and Theseus hunting the bull of Marathon (that which Herakles had brought from Crete, indicating another contact between the two heroes), which he afterwards sacrificed to Apollo (Figs. 7-11).¹² Herakles is depicted naked, with the Nemean lion-skin draped across his left shoulder and down his back.¹³ Theseus also appears naked, his face that of a youth, and the *chlamys* across his shoulders is draped loosely down his back.¹⁴

The third vessel, an amphora-rhyton (29 cm high, weight 1,695.25 grammes), is not only the largest and heaviest vessel of the treasure, but also the most interesting, impressive, richest and enigmatic, thematically (Figs. 12-18).¹⁵ The representation on its body is designed in an antithetic composition, divided asymmetrically on either side of a double-winged gate (Fig. 18). The exquisitely depicted gate, seemingly carpentered from wooden planks affixed with rows of round-headed iron nails, is flanked by two columns with Ionic capitals. Above them is a decorative motif of a

¹¹ VENEDIKOV 1961, Figs. 7-8; KISYOV n.d., 15; KITOV n.d., Figs. 36-38, 40 (on pp. 26-28); GRAVES 1969, 2, 110-112 (with literary sources).

¹² See VENEDIKOV 1961, Figs. 6-7; KITOV n.d., Figs. 36-37, 39-40 (on pp. 26-28); see also ROSE 1959, 264-265; LIMC VII.1-2, 925-929, 936-939, Nos. 33-34, 36, 43-44, 46-47, 49-52, 54-55, 60, 176, 179, 181-182, 184-191, 193, 195-196, 198a-201, 204-206, 208-209, 212-214, 216. For additional aspects of the myth of Theseus, in Greek poetry and visual art, see OLMOS (ed.), 1992.

¹³ VENEDIKOV 1961, Figs. 7-8; KISYOV n.d., 15; KITOV n.d., Figs. 37-38 (on pp. 26-27).

¹⁴ VENEDIKOV 1961, Figs. 6-7; KITOV n.d., Figs. 37, 39 (on pp. 26-27).

¹⁵ SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, 147-157 (Abb. 16 on p. 150); SIMON 1960, Abb. 2 (on p. 12); VENEDIKOV 1961, 14-16, Figs. 25-34; ROUX 1964, Fig. 1 (on p. 31); KISYOV n.d., 6-8; KITOV n.d., 12-19, Figs. 1, 7, 10-12, 15, 17-23; OVCHAROV 2003, 42; MINTCHEV 2006, 134.



Fig. 2. First *rhyton*. The Judgment of Paris (Kisyov n.d., 12).

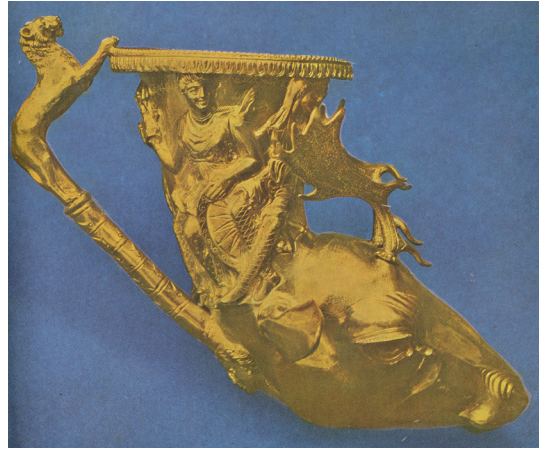


Fig. 3. First *rhyton*. The Judgment of Paris with the images of Athena and Alexandros (Paris) (Venedikov 1961, fig. 2).

lion's head (Figs. 12, 14, 18-19).¹⁶ The gate, probably representing in a minimized way a fortified city, is slightly open and between its two wings the hands and part of the bald head of a bearded man are visible. His pose expresses both surprise and fear upon seeing the attacking warriors. Five armed figures, one behind the other, advance towards the gate in a heroic pose, with their left leg bent and their right one outstretched. They are depicted in disproportion, large in size in relation to the gate and the figure hiding behind it. They are naked and bare-footed, with decorated mantles over their shoulders, marching along a rough surface towards the gate. The free-floating mantels, forming three-dimensional flying folds behind their backs, emphasize their movement. Belts, crossing diagonally the chest, are visible on the first, fourth and fifth warriors, probably for attaching scabbard and sword, while the second and third warriors are without belts, holding the scabbard in their left hand and the sword in their right. The figures' muscles are emphasized and rather stylized. Four of the five warriors are bearded while the third in the row is beardless. The figures express concentration and strain, discernible on their faces and in the motion of their bodies. The first four armed warriors, closest to the gate, are vigorously drawing their swords. The fifth one is giving the signal with a (war)-trumpet (ΣΑΛΠΙΓΞ – *salpinx*) to his comrades to begin the attack on the fortified site (Figs. 12-15, 18).¹⁷

On the other side of the gate two figures are depicted vis-à-vis (Figs. 16-19). One is a bearded older man, facing the viewer, his head is tilted to the left. He wears a

¹⁶ SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, Abb. 16 (on p. 150); SIMON 1960, Abb. 2 (on p. 12); VENEDIKOV 1961, 15, Fig. 26; ROUX 1964, Fig. 1 (on p. 31); KITOV n.d., 14, Fig. 15 (on p. 15).

¹⁷ Cf. SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, Abb. 16 (on p. 150); SIMON 1960, Abb. 2 (on p. 12); VENEDIKOV 1961, 15, Figs. 25-29, 31; ROUX 1964, Fig. 1 (on p. 31); KITOV n.d., Figs. 7 (on p. 11), 11 (on p. 13), 15 (on p. 15), 17-21 (on pp. 16-18).



Fig. 4. First *rhyton*. The Judgment of Paris with the images of Hera and Aphrodite (Venedikov 1961, fig. 5).



Fig. 5. First *rhyton*. The Judgment of Paris with the image of Aphrodite (Kitov n.d., fig. 34).

lion-skin, patterned with a leaf-shaped group of dots,¹⁸ which can be identified with certainty, from the head and mane on the left side of the figure, as the Nemean lion-skin (his upper body is naked). It falls across his left shoulder, covering the lower part of his body and his legs. The other figure represents a naked youth, with a barely sprouting beard on either side of his young face. A decorated mantle (*chlamys*?), with leaf-shaped groups of dots, is draped loosely over his shoulders. His body is graceful, characterized by stylized muscles. Both figures have belts, crossing diagonally their chest, probably to hang their scabbard and sword. The older man is barefoot while the youth is wearing high-strapped sandals. Both figures are depicted in a *contrapposto* position and each has a knotty club. The youth holds this in his left hand, while that of the older man is resting on his left thigh.¹⁹ The older figure holds in his left hand a circular drinking vessel (cup or bowl), clasping it in four fingers while his thumb grasps the lip of the vessel. He is pointing towards it with the forefinger of his right

¹⁸ On the dotted lion-skin, belonging to Herakles, see *LIMC* IV.2, Nos. 32, 39-40, 57, 60-61, 271, 1325, 1332, 1336, 1423, 1428, 1438, 1442-1445, 1447, 1450, 1452, 1475.

¹⁹ See SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, Abb. 16 (on p. 150); SIMON 1960, Abb. 2 (on p. 12); VENEDIKOV 1961, 15, Figs. 29-31; ROUX 1964, Fig. 1 (on p. 31); KITOV n.d., Figs. 7 (on p. 11), 11 (on p. 13), 22 (on p. 18).



Abb. 2. Relief des 1. Rhytons.

Fig. 6. First *rhyton*. The Judgment of Paris, drawing (Svoboda – Concev 1956, abb. 2, 129).

hand, as if he expects a response from the young man standing opposite him. Or, perhaps they are discussing something connected with this drinking vessel, as the youth, looking concentratedly towards the face of the bearded older man, stretches out his right hand and makes a gesture with his thumb and index finger to pick it up, as if saying: “give me a little too!”²⁰

The division of the register into two scenes is effected by the trumpeter (**Figs. 13, 15, 17-18**), the last figure of the warrior group, and the youth standing vis-à-vis the older man, shown with their backs towards one another. The five figures of the warriors on one side of the gate and the two on the other side form two separate compositional and thematic scenes, albeit apparently representing two episodes of the same mythological narrative. Furthermore, the dynamic impression of the warriors’ scene is in sharp contrast with the tranquility of the two-figure scene. The two representations at the bottom of the amphora-*rhyton* show the child Herakles throttling the two snakes sent by Hera (**Figs. 20, 22**) and a reclining drunken Silenos, holding a *kantharos* or a *kyathos* in his right hand and a double-flute in his left hand (**Figs. 21-22**).²¹

²⁰ On hand gestures, see Quintilian, 11.3.85-87, 92-121 (D. A. Russell, trans., The Loeb Classical Library, V, Cambridge (Mass.)–London, 2001), although this particular hand gesture of the youth is not discussed in his work. A similar hand gesture can be observed on an Attic vase depicting the reception of Theseus in Athens (see KERÉNYI 1978, Fig. 52).

²¹ See SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, Abb. 13 (on p. 147); SIMON 1960, Abb. 1 (on p. 8); VENEDIKOV 1961, 16, Figs. 33-34; KISYOV n.d., 8; KITOV n.d., Figs. 10-12 (on pp. 12-13). For *kantharos* and *kyathos*, see FOLSOM 1967, 106 (Fig. 146), 185 (Figs. A-100–A-104) and 185-186 (Fig. A-105), respectively.



Fig. 7. Second *rhyton*. Herakles fighting against the Ceryneian hind and Theseus hunting the bull (Kisyov n.d., 15).



Fig. 8. Second *rhyton*. Herakles fighting against the Ceryneian hind (Kitov n.d., fig. 38).

It seems plausible to consider the two *rhyta* and the amphora-*rhyton* as related to each other not only as part of a luxurious drinking set, but also as a cycle of close themes, forming a thematic unity. This is suggested by the mythological scenes, images of divinities, heroes, etc., and the epigraphic evidence (the incised names in Greek).

Two other *rhyta* of the treasure, one in the shape of an animal head (the third *rhyton*),²² and the other in the shape of an animal *protome* (the fourth *rhyton*),²³ are also decorated with images of deities, a nymph and mythological figures. On the third *rhyton* appear Dionysos and the nymph Eriope²⁴ (ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ, ΗΡΙΟΠΗ²⁵), as well as two dancing maenads (**Fig. 23**). On the fourth *rhyton* four deities are represented: Apollo, Hera, Artemis and Nike. All names are incised in Greek letters (ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝ, ΗΡΗ, ΑΡΤΕΜΙΣ, ΝΙΚΗ) (**Fig. 24**).²⁶

²² VENEDIKOV 1961, 10, Figs. 9-11; KITOV n.d., 22, Figs. 28-29.

²³ VENEDIKOV 1961, 10-11, Figs. 12-16; KITOV n.d., 29-31, Figs. 41-45.

²⁴ See SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, Abb. 4 (on p. 131); SIMON 1960, Abb. 3 (on p. 19); VENEDIKOV 1961, 10, Figs. 9-11; KITOV n.d., 22, Figs. 28-29.

²⁵ Eriope is also identified with Alkimache (see GANTZ 1996, 1, 195).

²⁶ See SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, Abb. 5 (on p. 132); SIMON 1960, Abb. 6 (on p. 21); VENEDIKOV 1961, 10-11, Figs. 12-16; KITOV n.d., 28-31, Figs. 41-46.



Fig. 9. Second *rhyton*. Theseus hunting the Marathonian bull (Mintchev 2006, fig. 98, 138).



Fig. 10. Second *rhyton*. Theseus hunting the Marathonian bull (Kitov n.d., fig. 39).

2. Interpretation

Various scholars have engaged with the scene on the body of the amphora-*rhyton*, in an attempt to offer an interpretation. The interpretations vary a great deal from each other:

- a. A mundane event – a drunken company dashing off into the night to look for a girl.²⁷
- b. A military event – the capture of the Persian Gate by Alexander the Great,²⁸ in which, according to H.E. del Medico, the beardless young warrior – the third armed figure – represents the leader himself.²⁹
- c. A mythological scene – the siege and/or attack of a fortified city, as related in the tale of *The Seven against Thebes*.³⁰ However, it should be noted that the warriors here number only five.
- d. A murder in a mountain temple.³¹
- e. D. Tsonchev (=Concev) originally maintained that the relief on the amphora-*rhyton*, depicting a guard and seven armed figures, among them a trumpeter, represents an episode from the Trojan War. In other words, it displays a variant of the discovery of

²⁷ KITOV n.d., 18.

²⁸ KITOV n.d., 18.

²⁹ KITOV n.d., 18; DEL MEDICO 1967-1968, 52-67.

³⁰ See SIMON 1960, 12-16, especially 14 (Taf. 4, 1-6), where Simon notes the names of the Seven according to the canonic list of Euripides; KITOV n.d., 18-19; see also Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes* (A. H. Sommerstein, trans., The Loeb Classical Library, I, Cambridge (Mass.)–London, 2008).

³¹ See ROUX (1964, 30-41), who oddly suggested this interpretation, seeing the gate as that of a temple.



Fig. 11. Second *rhyton*. Herakles and Theseus, drawing (Svoboda – Concev 1956, abb. 3, 130).

Achilles in King Lykomedes' palace on the island of Skyros by Odysseus and Diomedes, who use both deception and violence. Tsonchev (=Concev) perceives the trumpeter as calling Achilles to join his comrades in the Trojan War.³² According to Venedikov, Tsonchev realized that this interpretation is without support, then sought to adopt a new version of this theme.³³

In fact, there are five warriors (together with the trumpeter) and not seven! The youth vis-à-vis the bearded elderly man seems to be, indeed, a hero or warrior, but certainly not Achilles. First, this pair forms a separate scene, independent of that of the five warriors; second, the youth is not disguised as a girl, hidden among the daughters of Lykomedes in the king's palace, as happened with Achilles; third, Odysseus, according to the traditional narrative, appeared (together with Diomedes) in Lykomedes' palace neither as a warrior nor with violence, but in deceptive and sophisticated way. He placed various feminine trinkets on the porch of the palace, together with a spear and a shield. While the girls were examining the baubles with curiosity, admiration and joy, Odysseus had a trumpet blown at a distance, as if in warning that the island was being invaded. Achilles instantly stripped off his girl's clothing and snatched up the spear and shield; and in this way he was discovered by

³² See TSONCHEV (1954, 1057), who claims that this is a scene from an unknown Greek play, perhaps on the discovery of Achilles in Skyros; TSONCHEV 1955, 224-225; SVOBODA – TSONCHEV 1956, 148-149, 153-154 (in this work Concev repeats his view that this scene is not found in the extant Classical Greek drama); see also VENEDIKOV 1961, 27-28, nn. 5, 11.

³³ See VENEDIKOV 1961, 28, n. 11; see also SIMON (1960, 11-12, Abb. 2), who rejects Concev's view.



Fig. 12. Amphora-*rhyton*. The first and second warriors in front of the door/gate of a fortified site (Mintchev 2006, fig. 94, 134).



Fig. 13. Amphora-*rhyton*. The trumpeter, Theseus and Herakles (Kis-yov n.d., 6).

Odysseus.³⁴ Accordingly, the discussed scene is far from depicting Odysseus and his comrades attacking and penetrating Lykomedes' fortified palace.

f. H. Hoffmann, who attributed the treasure to the 2nd-3rd centuries CE,³⁵ suggested that the two conversing figures are Herakles (the bearded elderly male figure), who holds an oracular liver in his left hand in order to foretell the future, and his nephew and companion Iolaos (the young male figure).³⁶ Tsonchev (=Concev), in contrast, claimed that it is not an oracular liver but a small vessel (probably a variant of a cup.- A.O.), with obscure drawings on its surface and surmounted by a cone-shaped object, possibly an egg or a spool of wool.³⁷

The bearded elderly male figure in the present scene is undoubtedly Herakles, leaning on his club, with the Nemean lion-skin draped over his body. It should be noted that he is frequently depicted holding a drinking vessel in one hand (*kantharos*, *kylix*, *rhyton*, *skyphos*, etc.),³⁸ and thus the circular object in his left hand is a

³⁴ TRIPP 1972, 6-7; GANTZ 1996, 2, 581 (with literary sources).

³⁵ HOFFMANN 1957, 392; *Id.* 1958, 121-141.

³⁶ HOFFMANN 1958, 132-134.

³⁷ See HOFFMANN 1957, 392.

³⁸ See *LIMC* IV.1-2, 498-499, 501, 766-769, 771, 774-776, 778-779, 802, 812, 818-819, Nos. 757-758, 763, 769-771, 773, 782-784, 790, 794, 822-823, 829, 854-855, 858, 860, 879, 882, 955-956, 960-961, 995-



Fig. 14. Amphora-*rhyton*. The first and second warriors in front of the door/gate of a fortified site (Kisyov n.d., 7 [bottom]).



Fig. 15. Amphora-*rhyton*. The fourth warrior and the trumpeter (Kitov n.d., fig. 20).

drinking vessel and not an oracular liver; it probably indicates his intent to drink. The drinking vessel also recalls Herakles' association with Dionysos, especially at banquets/symposia³⁹ and in the drinking contest with the god.⁴⁰ In addition, the youth vis-à-vis Herakles is a hero or warrior, but not Iolaos.

Who, therefore, is the naked youth depicted facing Herakles on the wall of the amphora-*rhyton*? His young, vital appearance, his barely sprouting beard, and especially the club as his attribute in his left hand,⁴¹ enable us to identify him with Theseus.⁴² If, indeed, this identification is correct, then Theseus appears twice on this drinking set: on the amphora-*rhyton*, facing Herakles; and on the second *rhyton*, waging a battle against the Marathonian bull,⁴³ alongside Herakles who is fighting the legendary Ceryneian hind.

Herakles is depicted three times on the vessels of the treasure: once on the second *rhyton*, fighting against the Ceryneian hind,⁴⁴ and twice on the amphora-*rhyton*, on the wall of the vessel as a tired (drunken?) bearded older man with a club, a lion-skin

996, 1045-1046, 1050, 1057, 1060-1061, 1376, 1450, 1490-1491, 1502-1504, 1506, 1508, 1511; *LIMC* V.2, Nos. 3407, 3411, 3419, 3428, 3476, 3484. TSONCHEV (1955, 224-225; 1956, 151-153) identified him as Odysseus vis-à-vis Diomedes.

³⁹ See below, n. 57.

⁴⁰ See below, n. 58.

⁴¹ See below, n. 49.

⁴² Contrary to TSONCHEV's identification (1955, 224-225; 1956, 151-153) as Diomedes.

⁴³ See above, nn. 12, 14.

⁴⁴ See VENEDIKOV 1961, 9, Figs. 6-8; KITOV n.d., Figs. 36-38 (on pp. 26-27).



Fig. 16. Amphora-rhyton. Herakles and Theseus (Venedikov 1961, fig. 30).

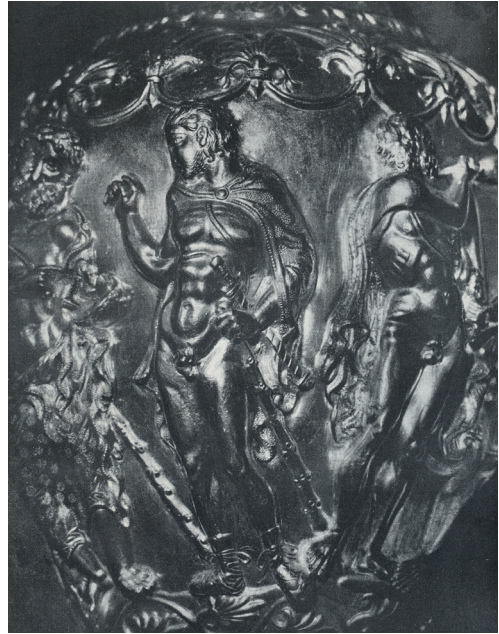


Fig. 17. Amphora-rhyton. Herakles, Theseus and the trumpeter (Venedikov 1961, fig. 31).

and a circular drinking vessel;⁴⁵ and again on its bottom as an infant fighting the two serpents.⁴⁶ Herakles' representation more than once and more than any other figure on this gold set, suggests the importance attributed to him by the patron(s) and possibly also by the artist(s) of this remarkable gold treasure.

According to some ancient writers, Theseus had listened since childhood with admiration and envy to tales of the labours of Herakles. He was determined to emulate him and make an enviable name for himself.⁴⁷ There is also a view that "Theseus owes much of his mythical *persona* to the desire of Athenians, and especially the tyrant Peisistratus in the sixth century B.C., to make of him a great national hero. They did so in two ways: by associating him as closely as possible with Herakles, the *beau idéal*, and by ascribing to him various political and benevolent acts that were held to be the beginning of Athenian democracy".⁴⁸ In other words, Theseus was the Athe-

⁴⁵ Cf. above, n. 38.

⁴⁶ See VENEDIKOV 1961, 16, Fig. 33; KITOV n.d., Figs. 10 (on p. 12), 11 (on p. 13).

⁴⁷ See, for example, Plutarch, *Theseus* VI.6-7 (B. Perrin, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1967); see also TRIPP 1972, 563, s.v. 'Theseus' (with literary sources).

⁴⁸ KIRK 1990, 152, 154.

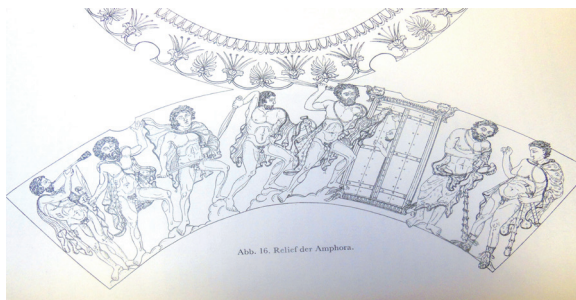


Fig. 18. Amphora-*rhyton*. Representation of the five warriors, and Herakles and Theseus in an antithetic composition on both sides of the door/gate, drawing (Svoboda – Concev 1956, abb. 16, 150).

Fig. 19. Amphora-*rhyton*. Herakles and Theseus, detail of Fig. 18 (Svoboda–Concev 1956, abb. 16, p. 150).

nian Herakles, with a set of labours ridding the world of trouble. He was accosted by the brigand Periphetes, who was known as Korynetes or Club-bearer, because of the huge (brazen/wooden/iron) club he always carried and with which he used to kill passersby. Theseus, however, managed to seize Periphetes' club and killed him instead (one of the many traits in his legend manifestly copied from Herakles). Taking a fancy to the club, more perhaps as a trophy than as a weapon, he took it with him and thenceforth it became his attribute.⁴⁹

The mythological representations in the above-mentioned three vessels (the first and second *rhyta* and the amphora-*rhyton*) seem to have a common thematic and narrative link, indicating indirectly the two abductions of Helen. The first one was carried out by Theseus with the aid of Peirithoos, King of the Lapiths, when Helen was a young girl (only ten or twelve years old).⁵⁰ Some myths tell that Theseus want-

⁴⁹ See Plutarch, *Theseus* VIII.1: *And being pleased with the club, he took it and made it his weapon and continued to use it, just as Heracles did with the lion's skin. That hero wore the skin to prove how great a wild beast he had mastered, and so Theseus carried the club to show that although it had been vanquished by him, in his own hands it was invincible*; Apollodorus, *Library* III.xvi.1 (J. G. Frazer, trans., The Loeb Classical Library, II, London–Cambridge (Mass.)–New York, 1963); see also TRIPP 1972, 563, s.v. 'Theseus' (with literary sources); GRAVES 1972, 1, 327-328 (with literary sources); GANTZ 1996, 1, 250-251 (with literary and artistic sources); LIMC VII.1-2, 928, 937-938, 941, 946-947, Nos. 51-52, 188-189, 201, 204-206, 208-209, 241, 293, 296, 302.

⁵⁰ See Apollodorus, *Epitome* I.23 (J. G. Frazer, trans., The Loeb Classical Library, I, London–Cambridge (Mass.)–New York, 1967); TRIPP 1972, 570, s.v. 'Theseus' (with literary sources); GRAVES 1972, 1, 362-364 (with literary sources); LIMC VII.1, 945. Pausanias (III.xviii.14-15, V.xix.2-3 [W. H. S. JONES – H. A. ORMEROD, trans., The Loeb Classical Library, II, London–Cambridge (Mass.), 1966]) claims to have seen the tale of Theseus and Peirithoos carrying off Helen on the Archaic Throne of Amyklai by Bathykses and the image of Helen between the Dioscuri on the Chest (*Larnax*) of Kypselos (ca. 580-540 BCE, placed in the Temple of Hera at Olympia). Scenes on several shield bands and on several Attic black-figure vases, in which a woman is seized by two young men, are thought by some scholars to show the abduction of Helen, though the figures are not named. On an Attic red-figure amphora from Vulci with inscriptions, from the last quarter of the 6th century BCE, Theseus carries off a woman named Korone, as Helen runs after them and Peirithoos follows. It is likely that the painter or his assistant accidentally reversed the names of the women here and the scene is, rather, the abduction of Helen (see CARPENTER 1991, 166, Ill. 258; GANTZ 1996, 1, 288-291 [esp. 290-291, where are described a few certain representations of the story in Greek visual art]). The abduction of



Fig. 20. Amphora-ryhton. Herakles slaying the two serpents (Venedikov 1961, fig. 33).

ed to become kin to the Dioscuri (Castor and Polydeukes [Pollux]), Helen's brothers; others claim that he and Peirithoos had vowed that they would both marry daughters of Zeus and that they would aid each other in fulfilling this ambition. Theseus took Helen to the town of Aphidna, in Attica, and left her in the charge of his mother, Aethra,⁵¹ while he went off to keep his part of the compact by helping Peirithoos to win his bride (Persephone, Zeus' daughter and Hades' wife).⁵² During their absence in the Underworld, the Dioscuri, with a force of Spartans and Arcadians, marched against Aphidna and took the city. They not only rescued their sister but also carried off Theseus' mother, Aethra, to be Helen's nurse.⁵³ On their arrival in the Underworld, Hades listened blandly while Peirithoos explained their purpose, then waved them to a seat and called for refreshment. The guests sat down on stone chairs, only to discover that they could not get up. Other versions point out that they were bound fast with chains

Helen by Theseus also appears on the pebble mosaic pavement found in Pella, Macedonia, dated approx. to 330-300 BCE (see POLLITT 1986, III. 226 [on pp. 214-215]).

⁵¹ See Apollodorus, *Library* III.x.7; KERÉNYI 1978, 235-238.

⁵² Some Classical writers denied that Theseus and Peirithoos went to the Underworld at all. They claimed that they went merely to the land of the Thesprotians or the Molossians in Epirus. The king of this land was named Aidoneus or Pluto (both names of Hades) and had a wife named Persephone and a daughter named Kore. He also had a fierce dog called Cerberus and forced all his daughter's suitors to fight it. When he found that Theseus and Peirithoos were planning to dispense with this obstacle by simply carrying off Persephone, he imprisoned Theseus and flung Peirithoos to the dog. It was from this predicament that Herakles saved Theseus by persuading Aidoneus to release him (Pausanias, I.xvii.4, II.xxii.6 [W. H. S. Jones, trans., The Loeb Classical Library, I, London-Cambridge (Mass.), 1969], III.xviii.5; Plutarch, *Theseus* XXXI.2-4, XXXV.1-2; Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.397 [H. R. Fairclough, trans., The Loeb Classical Library, I, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1986]); see also TRIPP 1972, 571, s.v. 'Theseus'; KERÉNYI 1978, 238-239; GANTZ 1996, 1, 72).

⁵³ See Apollodorus, *Library* III.x.7; Apollodorus, *Epitome* I.23; see also TRIPP 1972, 570, s.v. 'Theseus' (with literary sources); KERÉNYI 1978, 238.



Fig. 21. Amphora-rhyton. Drunken Silenos (Venedikov 1961, fig. 34).



Fig. 22. Amphora-rhyton. Drawing of Figs. 20-21 (Svoboda – Concev 1956, abb. 13, 147).

or with serpents, or that their flesh grew fast to the stone, and others still that they had unknowingly sat on the Chair of Lethe (Forgetfulness) and, presumably, had lost all recollection of why they had come. Theseus might have remained there forever (and did, according to Homer and Virgil), had not Herakles come down to Hades to fetch Cerberus for Eurystheus. Seeing Theseus and Peirithoos seated on their chairs, he tore Theseus loose, but when he tried to do the same for his companion, the earth quaked and Herakles dared not continue. Although some myths tell that Peirithoos, too, was saved, it is generally agreed that he had to remain in Hades, while Theseus accompanied Herakles back to the world of the living.⁵⁴

The second abduction of Helen was carried out by Paris,⁵⁵ when Helen was already Menelaus' wife and Queen of Sparta.⁵⁶ This abduction is hinted at by the Judgment of Paris depicted on the first *rhyton* of the Panagyurishte treasure, following the dispute between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite as to which of the three was fairest, and eventually the choice of the latter. This act in turn led to the second abduction of Helen, followed by the dramatic events of the Trojan War and its disastrous and tragic results.

⁵⁴ See Apollodorus, *Library* II.v.12; Apollodorus, *Epitome* I.24; see also TRIPP 1972, 571, s.v. 'Theseus' (with literary sources); GRAVES 1972, I, 363-364, 366-367 (with literary sources); KERÉNYI 1978, 239, Fig. 59 (a *leklythos* depicting the seated Theseus in the Underworld stretches out his right hand to Herakles, who is rescuing him); KIRK 1990, 154; *LIMC* VII.1-2, 946, Nos. 293, 294, 296, 298. In Greek visual art, Theseus and Peirithoos are depicted as seated figures in the Underworld, either stuck fast to their chairs or (in some versions) to rocks or to the ground, while Herakles is trying to rescue them (he rescued only Theseus); for example: on a bronze shield-band relief from Olympia of about 560 BCE; on an Attic red-figure *calyx-krater* by the Niobid Painter from Orvieto – ca. 450 BCE; on an Apulian red-figure *volute-krater* – late 4th century BCE, etc. (see CARPENTER 1991, 78-79, Ills. 125, 126, 128; GANTZ 1996, I, 291-295 [with literary and artistic sources]).

⁵⁵ See TRIPP 1972, 446-448, s.v. 'Paris' (with literary sources); GANTZ 1996, 2, 571-576 (with literary and artistic sources).

⁵⁶ See TRIPP 1972, 263-266 (esp. 263-264), s.v. 'Helen' (with literary sources).



Fig. 23. Third *rhyton*. Dionysos, Eriope and two dancing maenads (Svoboda – Concev 1956, abb. 4, 131).

The representations on the above-mentioned third and fourth *rhyta* depict deities, the nymph Eriope/Alkimache and dancing maenads that are not related thematically to the scenes shown on the first and second *rhyta*, nor to those on the amphora-*rhyton*. However, the deities – Dionysos, Hera, Apollo, Artemis and Nike – may be indirectly connected with Herakles and Theseus, who are depicted on the amphora-*rhyton* as well as on the second *rhyton*: Herakles and Dionysos are associated with banquets/symposia⁵⁷ and the drinking contest;⁵⁸ Hera sends the snakes to Herakles; Theseus sacrifices the Marathonian bull to Apollo; Artemis is the goddess of hunting; and Nike possibly represents the various victorious events.

In light of the above, I believe that the two antithetic representations depicted on the amphora-*rhyton* (Figs. 12-18) can be interpreted as follows: the general appearance of the bearded older man, the Nemean lion-skin draped across his body, the club and the circular drinking vessel, all indicate that this figure is Herakles, as some scholars have already identified.⁵⁹ Herakles is looking outwards (facing the viewer), his head is inclined to the left with an odd, dim and hallucinated gaze. The obscure vessel he holds in his left hand is the drinking cup from which he drank, such as those observed in artistic media depicting Herakles.⁶⁰ If, indeed, this is the case, Herakles appears to be inebriated next to the admiring young man. It can be said with certainty that the youth vis-à-vis Herakles is Theseus, characterized by his youthful

⁵⁷ See LIMC IV.2, Nos. 1490, 1497, 1502-1504, 1506, 1508, 1511, 1521.

⁵⁸ For the drinking contest between Herakles and Dionysos, see the central medallion of the Roman gold *patera* from Rennes in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris (LEVI 1971, 22), the Roman mosaic pavements from Antioch (the *House of the Atrium* and the *House of the Drinking Contest*) and Sepphoris/Zippori (OVADIAH – TURNHEIM 1997, 107-116).

⁵⁹ See HOFFMANN 1957, 392; TSONCHEV 1954, 1056-1057.

⁶⁰ See above, n. 38.



Fig. 24. Fourth *rhyton*. Apollo, Hera Artemis and Nike (Svoboda – Concev 1956, abb. 5, 132).

appearance, almost beardless face and the club he had taken from the brigand Periphetes. Theseus' gaze is directed admiringly to Herakles' face; he stretches out his right hand and gestures with the thumb and index finger, as if saying: "give me a little too!" Perhaps he is depicted here after his rescue by Herakles from Hades, returning to the light of day and the world of the living.

3. Summary

It can be assumed that the scene of the warlike event and the figures of Herakles and Theseus on the amphora-*rhyton* were familiar to the contemporary audience. Hence, the artist(s) did not find it necessary to incise the title of the event and the names of the heroes, unlike on the other vessels.

Finally, the dramatic events, seen and unseen, portrayed on the amphora-*rhyton* and two *rhyta* of the treasure can be interpreted as follows:

1. Theseus, with the aid of Peirithoos, carries off Helen (the first abduction), to Aphidna in Attica (not depicted).
2. The five warriors, including the trumpeter who gives the signal for attack on the fortified city, seem to represent the Lacedaemonian and Arcadian army, led by the Dioscuri (who are not identified here) against Aphidna, in Attica, in order to liberate their sister Helen, when Theseus was absent in the Underworld (depicted on the am-

phora-*rhyton*).

3. Theseus in the company of the (drunken?) Herakles, after he had been rescued from Hades and returned to the world of the living (depicted on the amphora-*rhyton*).

4. Theseus, who admires Herakles and his labours, imitates them, as in the case of the Marathonian bull (depicted on the second *rhyton*).

5. The Judgment of Paris, foretelling Helen's second abduction (depicted on the first *rhyton*).⁶¹

The mythological scenes, divinities, heroes, etc., depicted on the three vessels are connected thematically and form one unity. Following the mythological narrative and circumstantial evidence, I believe that the interpretation posited here indeed offers a rational solution to the visual presentation.

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⁶¹ The two abductions are connected thematically, despite the different circumstances, time, place, events and results.

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