

**Not Just for the Birds: Augury and Archaic Attic Vase Paintings**

by

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## **NOT JUST FOR THE BIRDS: AUGURY AND ARCHAIC ATTIC VASE PAINTING**

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With the exception of extispicy scenes catalogued by Francois Lissarrague and snake-eagle omens discussed by Diana Rodríguez Pérez, divination has been ignored by vase-painting scholars and of ancient religion scholars, only Michael Flower has touched on visual sources. Despite this lack of attention by current scholars, acts of divination and birds that I argue ought to be interpreted as omens appeared on hundreds of black figure Attic vases in the sixth century. Most of these bird omens were painted behind men on horseback. Henri Metzger examined a subset of this group, the funerary Rider Amphorae, and concluded that the riders were cavalry and the eagle an attribute of Zeus, the patron god of the cavalry. The riders' armor suggests that horsemen were hoplites and because of the prominence of augury in everyday life, the birds are best identified as ambiguous omens. These bird omens add a future temporal dimension and emphasize the uncertainties of battle. By doing so, the Rider Amphorae highlighted the virtues of the horsemen and eulogized them at the tomb. Other vases with men on horseback were used in the symposium where the moment of the journey provided a common experience which fostered bonding among the symposiasts. The moment of a man embarking journey joined by a bird omen corresponds to Babylonian omens, the British Museum tablet 108874 and the Summa Alu, and may be explained as an example of a wider Mediterranean understanding of divination. Examining augury and bird portents in Attic vases provides insight into both the layman understanding of augury and the vase painter construction of narrative.

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## PREFACE

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Although all of these people have provided me with invaluable help and support, I take full responsibility for errors or omissions below, for they are mine and mine alone.





## 1.0 INTRODUCTION: A SKYPHOS BY THE THESEUS PAINTER

A colossal bird perches on top of a boulder, its head bent over a hare; gore dribbles out of the bird's beak; the hare's neck is stained with blood. Two helmeted draped men sit on either side of the bird, fixated on the sight between them. This dramatic scene appears on a skyphos attributed to the Theseus Painter dated to the late sixth century.<sup>1</sup> The reverse has a similar composition and theme.<sup>2</sup> In the center of the field, a giant bird perches atop a rock, a snake clutched in its talons. Two helmeted men look directly at it and appear to talk, presumably about the sight between them. The size of the rock, the bird, and the snake are exaggerated so that the eagle stands at eye-level to the men. Some scholars have interpreted the boulder as the Delphic omphalos because of its large size, beehive shape, and added white around the outline of each stone.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the location of the stone, the size, central location, and attention given to birds by the male figures suggest that they are portents, an interpretation bolstered by their similarity with portents in the literary tradition.<sup>4</sup> The bird and snake is reminiscent of *Iliad* 12.201-209:

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<sup>1</sup> Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. H2458 (*BAPD* 16211, *Paralipomena* 255 = <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/4F666A01-8993-49AB-BC13-A4E5895B498C>).

<sup>2</sup> The Theseus painter typically decorated both sides of vessels with similar scenes (Steiner 1997, 157-170, Borgers 2003, 29-30).

<sup>3</sup> Harrison 1899, 225-227. These figures can only be seen in alternate photographs of the skyphos in Harrison (1899, 227) and *BAPD* 16211.

<sup>4</sup>The Delphic omphalos identification for the stone would bolster the argument that the birds are omens because of the obvious connection to prophecy. Furthermore, 8 of 36 bird scenes in the *Iliad* recount the birds on or near rocks, mountains, or cliffs (Johannson 2012, 228).

An eagle soaring high on the left veered closely towards the men, carrying a blood-red portentous (*teloron*) snake struggling for life- and it had not yet surrendered the fight, for it struck the chest of the eagle holding it right beside the eagle's throat- the eagle doubled over backwards in pain. Writhing in pain, the eagle flung the snake on the ground, throwing it down in the midst of the crowd and shrieked as it flew away with a gust of wind. The Trojans shuddered, seeing how the serpent squirmed in their midst, a sign (*teras*) from aegis-bearing Zeus.<sup>5</sup>

The bird and hare bring to mind the famous omen from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* which prompted the sacrifice of Iphigenia:

A frenzied bird of omen, the king of birds to the king of the ships: suddenly, one black and one white eagle appeared side by side near the rooftops, from the side of the spear-wielding hand. In a perch conspicuous to all, they feasted on a pregnant hare, begetting offspring, severing their final course of life.<sup>6</sup>

These two images do not line up perfectly with the two texts,<sup>7</sup> but the parallels are too clear to ignore— the birds and their prey must be omens.

While this is, to my knowledge, the most obvious example of bird omens in Athenian vase painting, it is not the only one. With exception of extispicy scenes catalogued by Francois Lissarrague, the snake-eagle omens examined by Diana Rodríguez-Pérez, and examples of divination discussed by Michael Flower, omens in vase-paintings have not been examined.<sup>8</sup> I show how interpreting a bird as an omen in a popular motif of horsemen, provides us with a better understanding of narrative construction, the common tradition of augury, and what virtues were important to elite men.

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<sup>5</sup> Hom. *Il.* 12.200-209.

<sup>6</sup> Aesch *Ag.* 111-120. Aeschylus also describes this as a *teras* in *Ag.* 125.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the eagle in the *Iliad* flies with the snake before relinquishing it; the eagle in the skyphos remains on the boulder. There were two eagles in *Agamemnon* but only one on the skyphos; the hare in *Agamemnon* was pregnant, but the Theseus painter only paints the hare.

<sup>8</sup> Lissarrague 1990, 55-69; Rodríguez Pérez 2011, 1-18; Flower 2008, 28, 34-5, 41, 48-9, 54-7, 98, 158, 163-4, 206-7, 213-5.

The goal of this paper is to provide a framework for identifying birds as portents and to focus on how doing so in a common scene of a horseman with a bird flying behind him enriches our understanding of what those paintings communicated to their audiences.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.1 IDENTIFYING BIRDS ON ATTIC VASES

Birds appear on vases in a variety of contexts and with a variety of meanings and, as the author of the Homeric Hymn to Hermes admonishes,<sup>10</sup> not all of them were prophetic.<sup>11</sup> Many serve as decoration such as birds in animal friezes, in master/mistress of animal scenes, or in Corinthian-influenced styles that sought to minimize open space.<sup>12</sup> Other decorations appear on or under handles, or alone as subjects of vases, as in tondos. Cocks and phallus birds, symbolized masculinity and erotic pursuits.<sup>13</sup> While not decoration, birds as actors in myth such as raven messenger to Apollo, the eagles of Zeus which feast on Prometheus' liver, Zeus as a swan pursuing Ganymede and the Symphalian birds cannot be portents.<sup>14</sup> Water-birds, such as swans, ducks, and geese, were associated with aspects of domestic life and are best interpreted as pets when women and children directly interacted with them.<sup>15</sup> The same is true for vases which include bird cages. Birds, usually roosters, perched on top of columns have been identified as

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<sup>9</sup> The ideas that birds in art ought to be interpreted as portents and my method of arguing that specific birds are portents are ideas which I think hold true for ancient art in other periods and cultures which had a tradition of augury.

<sup>10</sup> *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 543-549.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview and bibliography of birds in art from the Bronze Age to the Roman empire, see Harden 2014, 24-60, Lambertson 1985, 1-3.

<sup>12</sup> Harden 2014, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Shapiro, 1981, 134.; Boardman 1992, 227-242; Dover 1989, 133.; Keuls 1993, 76, 84.

<sup>14</sup> Bourne 1982, 234-235; Green 1990, 37-63.

<sup>15</sup> Lynch 2006, 10-12; Beaumont 2013, 331. Ducks were attributes or pets of children (Beaumont 2013, 16-18, 61-61, 190-193). Geese and swans appear more with women (Lynch 2006, 10; Klein 1932, 10-12; Lazenby 1949, 299-307).

metaphors for Athenian political power, evidence for the importance of the cockfight in Athens, or stand-ins for ritual trees.<sup>16</sup> Birds as shield devices have also been interpreted as portents, but they have been sufficiently discussed by other scholars.<sup>17</sup>

Some birds serve as emblems or attributes for the divine, such as the owl for Athene and the eagle for Zeus.<sup>18</sup> In many of these vases, specific birds serve to indicate the god's presence or specific interest in the figures in the scene.<sup>19</sup> For example, in the altercation between Theseus and the Minotaur depicted in an amphora attributed to Lydos,<sup>20</sup> an owl stands between Theseus' feet, so large that its head is on the same level as Theseus' knees. Because of the owl's status as an attribute of Athena, this owl's presence so close to Theseus highlights Athena's close relationship and patronage of Theseus and by extension, Theseus' status as the patron hero of Athens, which was solidified in the sixth century.<sup>21</sup> A bird that is an attribute can also be a portent. In this case, the owl of Athena also foreshadows Theseus' success against the Minotaur and even as king of Athens later on.

If the bird cannot be easily identified under any of the categories described above, then one ought to consider whether it is an omen. This interpretation is attractive because laymen had some understanding of divination: as Hermes made clear in his Homeric Hymn, some Greeks were prone to consider even "idly chattering" birds to be omens.<sup>22</sup> Augury was an especially accessible form of divination because everyone, regardless of gender, citizenship, or

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<sup>16</sup> Callisen 1939, 160-178; Popkin 2012, 207-235; Eckerman 2012, 39-50.

<sup>17</sup> Rodríguez Pérez 2011, 6-8.

<sup>18</sup> Harden 2014, 25, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Gilhus 2006, 106, 112-113. For more on ancient pets: Bodson 2005, 27-41.

<sup>20</sup> Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 164359: *BAPD* 310172, *ABV*, 109, no. 26

<sup>21</sup> Walker 1995, 15, 21, 24, 35-50; Davies, 1982, 25-34; Shapiro 1992, 29-49.

<sup>22</sup> *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 543-549. Beerden 2013, 55- 59; Flower 2008, 53-55; Johnston 2014, 89-105. In Herodotus, for example, with two exceptions (Hdt. 1.78.1, 7.37.2) lay people perform all reported divination (Hollman 2011, 62; Beerden 2013, 56).

class, could see and hear birds in the sky. Aristophanes mocked the Athenians' reliance on bird omens, saying "when you are first faced with anything, from business matters to the acquisition of life to the marriage of men, you turn to the portentous birds. You believe all things that one judges about the mantic arts to be portentous birds."<sup>23</sup> While this is hyperbole for the sake of humor, rather than an attempt to describe reality, these words contained a grain of truth.<sup>24</sup> Homer described a bird that even the Achaean army could interpret: "a bird flew on the right, an eagle soaring, at which the men of the Achaeans, let out a shout, in response to the portentous bird."<sup>25</sup> Although any type of bird could be an omen,<sup>26</sup> most omens were birds of prey, and especially eagles because of their connection with Zeus.<sup>27</sup> In *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus boasts that he provided Athenians with the knowledge of interpreting good and bad omens from "large birds of prey with crooked talons" (γαμψωνύχων... οἰωνῶν).<sup>28</sup> The birds on the skyphos by the Theseus Painter are most likely eagles because of their predatory nature, large size, non-existent necks, and smaller heads.

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<sup>23</sup> Ar. Av. 717-719.

<sup>24</sup> Dunbar 1995, esp. 1-5. For the ability of birds to replace Delphi and other oracles see 716 and 618-9 (Dunbar 1995, 449). Other instances of birds portents are referenced by Aristophanes (Ar. Av. 590-7).

<sup>25</sup> Hom. *Il.*, 13.821-823. Cf. Beerden 2013, 54.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Penelope's dream about geese in Hom. *Od.* 19.602-625.

<sup>27</sup> Johnston 2009, 129-130. Hom. *Il.*, 8.248-252; 12.39-40. In *De Divinatione*, Cicero explains that "the divine reason executes this same phenomenon in the cases of bird omens, making it so that *alites* fly first here, then to there and from there, then in some part they disappear." (Cic. *Div.* 1.53). While *ales* has been translated as "bird," its more precise meaning is "eagle" (Thompson 1895, 1, 6, 105). Additionally in *De Divinatione*, eagles or *aequiles* account for the most (and only) bird omens identified by species (Cic. *Div.* 1. 26; 1.64; 1.106; 2.70.144).

<sup>28</sup> Aesch. *PV* 488-489; Watson 1870, 92.

## 1.2 ATTIC VASES WITH BIRD PORTENTS

The skyphos by the Theseus Painter and the other vases in this study have been catalogued on the online Beazley Archives (*BAPD*), to which I limited myself for practical reasons.<sup>29</sup> I looked at 656 vases with birds on them and determined their functions based on the criteria described above. In the Archaic and Classical eras, most ominous birds appear on Attic black figured pottery. Birds on Corinthian pottery tend to be decoration, and because red figure iconography shifted towards the *oikos* and away from battle and battle-related scenes,<sup>30</sup> birds on Attic red figure are mostly best identified as pets, erotic symbols, or signs of domesticity.<sup>31</sup> Attic black figure vases dated to the sixth century with bird omens include Ajax and Achilles playing dice,<sup>32</sup> combat between Theseus and the Minotaur,<sup>33</sup> Herakles and Triton/Nessos/Geryon,<sup>34</sup> and unidentified warriors<sup>35</sup> who often fight over a fallen comrade.<sup>36</sup> Other examples of what appear

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<sup>29</sup> For the efficacy of using *BAPD* data, see Schauer 2011, 202-203.

<sup>30</sup> Cook 1972, 167, 171; Sutton 2004, 347.

<sup>31</sup> Klein 1932, pl. I-XL.; Green 1971, 189; Sutton 1997, 42-43.

<sup>32</sup> An unattributed Cup A (Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano, inv. no. A343: *BAPD* 2508) includes two playing scenes- the obverse has one bird, the reverse has two. All three are accompanied by nonsense inscriptions. Other examples include: an unattributed amphora B: Sevres, Musée Céramique, inv. no. 6405 (*BAPD* 10478); an unattributed volute krater fragment: Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. CP11291 (*BAPD* 12240); an olpe attributed to the Leagros Group: Munich, Antikensammlungen, inv. no. 1790 (*BAPD* 1943); and a neck amphora attributed to the Toulouse Painter: Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, inv. no. 925.97 (*BAPD* 351046, *Paralipomena*, 141.2).

<sup>33</sup> Examples of Theseus: amphora attributed to Lydos: Malibu (CA), The J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. no. S82.AE.38, L69.11.6 (*BAPD* 10143); and amphora by Lydos: Tours, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. 863.2.65 (*BAPD*, 5601).

<sup>34</sup> Example of Herakles and Triton: Hydria attributed to the Euphiletos Painter: Hillsborough (CA), W.R. Hearst Historical State Monument, inv. no. 6 (*BAPD* 14555). Herakles and Nessos: an olpe: Paris, Musée Auguste Rodin, inv. no. 9 (*BAPD* 300165, *ABV*, 15, no. 32). Herakles and Geryon: unattributed amphora B: London, British Museum, inv. No. B157 (*BAPD* 11916).

<sup>35</sup> Examples of unidentified warriors: an unattributed lekythos: Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. VINC9 (*BAPD* 23664).

<sup>36</sup> Examples of unidentified warriors fighting over a fallen soldier: an amphora attributed to the Princeton Painter: Rhodes, Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 1346 (*BAPD* 320406; *ABV*, 298, no. 7). An amphora attributed to the Painter of Munich 1410: Munich, Antikensammlungen, inv. no. J328 (*BAPD* 301593, *ABV*, 311, no. 1, *Paralipomena* 133). an amphora attributed to Group E: Kassel, Staatliche Museen Kassel, inv. no. T674 (*BAPD* 350427, *Paralipomena* 56).

to be bird omens are included in scenes of men driving chariots, performing sacrifices, or, in the greatest numbers, riding horses.<sup>37</sup>

### 1.2.1 The Rider Amphorae

Vases referred to as the “Rider Amphorae,” such as an Amphora B attributed to the Painter of Acropolis 606, depict a man with a helmet and often greaves, carrying a shield on horseback.<sup>38</sup> On this vase, a second man’s head is visible behind the first, and because his helmet is less elaborate he is probably a squire. On other vases, the squire’s presence is indicated only by the outline of a second horse.<sup>39</sup> A bird flies behind them, which Sir John Beazley identified as an eagle because of its large, striped tail, small head, and talons.<sup>40</sup> The eagle clutches a snake in its beak, which makes it likely to be an omen, like those on the Theseus Painter’s skyphos.<sup>41</sup> The meaning of this omen, however, is unclear.<sup>42</sup> Beazley described it as “doubtless a good omen,”<sup>43</sup> while Diana Rodríguez Pérez and Margot Schmidt are probably correct to view it as a vague indication of some future event.<sup>44</sup>

The amphora by the Painter of Acropolis 606 is the only Rider Amphora to include a snake with an eagle and that eagle is the only one scholars have argued to be a portent. In 1962, Henri Metzger and Denis van Berchem interpreted the horseman as a cavalryman and the eagle

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<sup>37</sup> Examples of each (respectively): New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 1999.30B (*BAPD* 302216); unattributed neck amphora: Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, 20842 (*BAPD* 43129).

<sup>38</sup> Amphora: Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. no. 4823 (*BAPD* 300757; *ABV*, 81, no. 4 = <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/29D6DA9E-A732-4573-A1A6-F6584B3AE782>).

<sup>39</sup> For the squires as outline and their placement, see Moore 2006, 43-44.

<sup>40</sup> Beazley 1951, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Metzger 1967, 155.

<sup>42</sup> Metzger 1967, 155.

<sup>43</sup> *Paralipomena* 39-40.

<sup>44</sup> Rodríguez Pérez 2011, 4-5.

as an attribute of Zeus, the patron god of the cavalry god in both Athens and Rome.<sup>45</sup> The horsemen, however, are not cavalrymen but hoplites and their squires.<sup>46</sup> The horsemen are too heavily armed to fight on horseback:<sup>47</sup> they carry large round shields whose proportion and position suggests that it is an *aspis*, the type of shield used by a hoplite.<sup>48</sup> *Aspides* were three feet high and covered over half of the hoplite's body from their necks to their mid- to lower thighs- as the shields on the Rider Amphora do.<sup>49</sup> Their size and weight (between seventeen and twenty pounds) would have made it impractical for warriors to fight with *aspides* on horseback.<sup>50</sup> These figures are accompanied by a second figure, probably a squire, whose presence is generally implied through an outline of another horse's legs or depicted as youths wearing *chitoniskoi* and holding one or two spears.<sup>51</sup> The iconographical record supports the argument that men did not fight with shields. Some vases depict these squires holding or riding the horses while the hoplites, dismounted, engage in battle.<sup>52</sup> One depicts the hoplite in the

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<sup>45</sup> Metzger 1967, 155-159. This interpretation is also upheld by Rodríguez Pérez 2011, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Direct argument against Metzger and van Bercham: Bugh 1988, 16-17. The existence of cavalry during the sixth century had been debated because concrete records of them did not appear until the fifth century, although now most scholars assume some form of cavalry existed at that time. (Helbig 1904, 15; Greenhalgh 1973, 75, 111. For an overview of arguments against the cavalry, see Worley 1994, 21-22. Sources that point unequivocally to the existence of cavalry include lead tablets describing horse values found in the Agora that date to the fourth and third centuries (Kroll 1977, 83-140), the cavalry frieze of the Parthenon carved in 443-438 BCE, the Bryaxis base dated to the mid-fourth century (Athens, National Museum 1733).

<sup>47</sup> Lissarrague (1990, 14) describes their armor as "oafish."

<sup>48</sup> Lissarrague 1990, 14-18. Much work has been conducted on the arms and armor of hoplites, particularly in recent years by Schwartz (2009, 25- 54) and Kagan (2013, 33-35). For the hoplite shield as an *aspis* and not a *hoplon*, see Lazenby 1996, 27-33.

<sup>49</sup> Schwartz 2008, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Schwartz 2008, 35-37, 96; Greenhalgh 1972, 103, 106; Moore 2006, 43-44. Xenophon (*Hipparchicus*, 12.4-5) did not recommend a shield but rather a gauntlet. Although he wrote a hundred and fifty years after the Rider Amphorae and prescribed his ideal cavalry equipment rather than describing common practice, Xenophon's opinion has weight because of his personal experience in the cavalry and because he is corroborated by vase-paintings and the realities of the *aspis*.

<sup>51</sup> Moore 2006, 43-44.

<sup>52</sup> For example, a Siana Cup attributed to the Ainipylos Painter: Amsterdam, Allard Pierson Museum inv. No. 13247 (BAPD 16323); a lekane attributed to the Corinthianizing Painter: Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 132615 (BAPD 300496, ABV, 58, no. 119, *Paralipomena*, 23).



process of dismounting.<sup>53</sup> I have not seen a single depiction of a warrior carrying a shield fighting on horseback; horsemen with shields never engage in battle, and horsemen engaged in battle are clad in a tunic or Thracian cloaks and wield spears.<sup>54</sup> The horsemen on the Rider Amphora have the armor of foot-soldiers, not men who fought on horseback, and they cannot be identified as cavalry. Because these horsemen are hoplites, the eagles behind them do not make sense as attributes of Zeus.<sup>55</sup>

If the purpose of the bird was to identify or highlight a connection about the rider, as Metzger argues the eagle did for the cavalry, the bird should appear consistently behind one type of horseman. The theme of a horseman with a bird flying behind him, however, was used by vase-painters for hoplites, squires,<sup>56</sup> cavalry,<sup>57</sup> youths,<sup>58</sup> archers,<sup>59</sup> and travelers/hunters.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, these horsemen were often part of a larger scene, such as a battle scene,<sup>61</sup> eye-

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<sup>53</sup> Little Masters Lip Cup attributed to Lydos/ a painter near Lydos: New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 25.78.4 (*BAPD* 310289, *ABV*, 119, no. 9, *Paralipomena*, 48, Moore 2006, 44).

<sup>54</sup> Examples of lightly-armored cavalry: Neck amphora: Malibu (CA), The J. Paul Getty Museum, inv. no. 86.AE.85 (*BAPD* 10152); unattributed hydria Bryn Mawr (PA), Bryn Mawr College, inv. no. P87 (*BAPD* 15032); Cup by the Corinthianizing Painter: Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. no. 3755 (*BAPD* 177). This conclusion, that lightly armored men were cavalry and heavily armored men were hoplites, was reached by Lissarrague (1990, 219) and Greenhalgh (1973, 101-103, 111-117).

<sup>55</sup> The cavalry were not documented as having a connection with Zeus until the fourth century-- two hundred years after the Rider Amphorae, so even if the horsemen were cavalrymen the eagle was not necessarily an attribute of Zeus (Bugh 1984, 16-17). During the sixth century, hoplites were considered to have a higher *arête* than cavalry because they fought on foot (Crowley 2012, 84-5).

<sup>56</sup> For example, an amphora attributed to the Princeton Painter: Warsaw, National Museum, 142320 (*BAPD* 320435, *ABV*, 300, no. 11); a lekanis attributed to the Corinthianizing Painter: Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 132642 (*BAPD* 300496, *ABV*, 58, no. 119, *Paralipomena*, 23).

<sup>57</sup> *Supra* n. 55

<sup>58</sup> An unattributed amphora B: Genoa, Museo Civico di Archeologia Ligure, inv. no. 1182 (*BAPD* 13943).

<sup>59</sup> An unattributed cup: Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano, inv. no. 16504 (*BAPD* 340396, *ABV*, 227, no. 17).

<sup>60</sup> An amphora B attributed to the Rycroft Painter: Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. no. 3274 (*BAPD* 306471, *ABV*, 675, no. 2).

<sup>61</sup> For example, a Siana Cup by the Corinthianizing Painter: Cleveland (OH), Museum of Art, inv. no. 65.78 (*BAPD* 758); a lekanis attributed to the Corinthianizing Painter: Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. no. 132615 (*BAPD* 300496, *ABV*, 58, no. 119).

cups,<sup>62</sup> and occasionally as departing warriors.<sup>63</sup> Because birds appear behind horsemen of myriad identities, their function should not be explained in conjunction with only one type of horseman. By examining another common scene with a mythical horseman and a bird, a more attractive interpretation becomes clear.

### 1.2.2 The Ambush of Troilos

Troilos, the son of Priam whom Achilles murdered on an altar of Apollo to fulfill a prophecy which allowed for Troy's defeat,<sup>64</sup> appeared frequently with one or two horses on sixth century black figure pottery, as well as in Greek and Etruscan art of all types during the Archaic age.<sup>65</sup> A Tyrrhenian amphora exhibits iconography standard to scenes of Achilles' ambush and pursuit of Troilos.<sup>66</sup> Achilles crouches behind the fountain at the far left, Polyxene fills her hydria, and Troilos sits wearing a short tunic on horseback, leading another horse.<sup>67</sup> Some vases include a large bird of prey perched on the fountain.<sup>68</sup> This bird has been identified as a raven, an attribute

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<sup>62</sup> For example, a Cup A attributed to the Painter of Vatican G69: Vatican City, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco Vaticano, G69 (*BAPD* 302671, *ABV*, 210, no. 1).

<sup>63</sup> For example, a plate: Heidelberg, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, inv. no. 68.2 (*BAPD* 2186); a neck amphora by Affecter: New York (NY), Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 56.171.17 (*BAPD* 301296, *ABV*, 239, no. 8).

<sup>64</sup> Boitani 1989, 5; Gantz 1996, 602; Sampson 2009, 59.

<sup>65</sup> Hedreen 2001, 120-121; Oleson, 1975, 189-200. The only surviving textual evidence for the murder of Troilos before the Hellenistic period exists in the *Kypria*, itself only surviving because Proclus included a summary in his *Chrestomathy*. See Hugh 1970, 494. Troilos's fate is also mentioned in passing by Homer (*Il.* 24.255-258) and Sophokles wrote a tragedy entitled "Troilos" that it did not survive.

<sup>66</sup> Munich, Antikensammlungen, 1436 (*BAPD*, 310004, *ABV*, 95, no. 4, *Paralipomena* 36 = <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/E73977A6-8EE4-43C3-A806-E20264CEB6CE>). For the standard iconography of Troilos scenes, see Hedreen 2001, 120-139.

<sup>67</sup> The presence of Polyxene foreshadows her own gruesome death at the hands of Neoptolomus or Achilles at the end of the Trojan War (Hedreen 2001, 131-134.)

<sup>68</sup> Hydria: Boston (MA), Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 89.561 (*BAPD* 78); Hydria: New York (NY), Metropolitan Museum, 45.11.2 (*BAPD* 300791, *ABV*, 85, no. 2, *Paralipomena* 524); Neck amphora: London, British Museum, 1899.7-21.2 (*BAPD* 300797, *ABV*, 86, no. 8, *Paralipomena* 32); Hydria London, British Museum, inv. no. B324 (*BAPD* 302019, *ABV*, 361, no. 24); Dinos: Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. E876 (*BAPD* 300837, *ABV*, 90, no. 1). There are

of Apollo that, like the owl of Athene in the Minoaur scene, also serves as a portent because both Troilos and Polyxene were killed by Achilles on the Thymbraion altar of Apollo.<sup>69</sup> On multiple vases, a bird (likely an eagle because of its wide tail, striped wings, and small head) flies behind him.<sup>70</sup> Troilos was not a cavalryman or hoplite. He appears either naked or in a short tunic without any weapons, and was too young to serve as a squire.<sup>71</sup> The viewers knew that he would be murdered shortly by Achilles, who is at that point is hidden to Troilos behind the fountain. The scene is effective because of its dramatic irony.<sup>72</sup> As discussed above, the Greeks had a basic understanding of augury and Troilos' impending fate makes it likely that the bird is an omen for him and perhaps also for Polyxene. This interpretation is bolstered by the direction the bird faces, which is the only way to represent the process of bird flight on a vase-painting.

### 1.2.3 Interpreting Bird Portents

Generally, the Greeks, along with most other Mediterranean societies, subscribed to the belief that the right side signified a good omen, and the left side a bad one.<sup>73</sup> Only one Greek attempt to codify the rules of augury has survived, an inscription from Ephesos dated to the sixth century:

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exceptions- one lekanis lid fragment (Eleusis, Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 4211: *BAPD* 5852) depicts a water bird climbing up the fountain, identified by its long, thin curved neck, indistinguishable face, and large body.

<sup>69</sup> Gantz 1993, 599-600; Oleson 1975, 195; Carpenter 1991, fig. 22.; Hedreen 2001, 169-171. For the iconography of the Thymbraion as an omphalos and thus linked to Apollo, see Hedreen 2001, 134-5; Carpenter 1991, 19-20.

<sup>70</sup> Dinos: Paris, Musee du Louvre, inv. no. E876 (*BAPD* 300387, *ABV*, 90, no. 1); Siana Cup: New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 01.8.6 (*BAPD* 300381, *ABV*, 51, no. 4); Siana Cup: Paris, Musee du Louvre, inv. no. CA6113; Tyrrhenian group amphora: Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen, inv. no. 436 (*BAPD* 310004, *ABV*, 95, no. 4).

<sup>71</sup> Hedreen 2001, 120,123.

<sup>72</sup> Hedreen 2001, 136.

<sup>73</sup> For more on the right-left dichotomy that persisted throughout ancient divination: Rochberg 2004, 57-5; Guinan 1996, 5-10.

...In this case, if flying from the auspicious side to the left side it will disappear, [it is] auspicious. Conversely, if it will lift up the inauspicious wing, whether if it will lift upward or disappear, [it is] inauspicious. In the opposite case, if flying from the inauspicious side to the auspicious side, it will disappear in a straight line, [it is] inauspicious, but if lifting the auspicious wing...<sup>74</sup>

Because it was inscribed on stone, it must have been intended for a public audience<sup>75</sup> who already had a basic understanding of divination, understanding δεξιός to mean both “right” and “auspicious” and εὐώνυμος to mean both “left” and “inauspicious.”<sup>76</sup> For example, the Achaean army, in the passage cited above, recognized the eagle as a good omen because it was on the right. The bird flying behind Troilos is a dooming portent because the myth ends with his and Polyxene’s murders, and, to a lesser extent, because its left directionality is consistent with the loose guidelines of Greek divinatory practice. This Tyrrhenian amphora provides an example of the horseman-bird theme which cannot be explained by Metzger’s interpretation: the horseman is not a cavalryman and the bird is not an attribute of Zeus in conjunction with the cavalry. Instead, because Troilos is part of a known myth, the bird can be interpreted as a dooming omen which portends his death.

Interpreting the Rider Amphora, such as an amphora attributed to the Circle of Lydos, is more difficult.<sup>77</sup> The rider’s hoplite panoply implies that he is journeying to or from battle, and the horse’s slow pace suggests that battle is not imminent.<sup>78</sup> The bird, which on this vase is

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<sup>74</sup> Hicks, 1874 Section X., DCLXXVIII; *SIG* III 1167; Wood 1877, *Inscriptions from the City and Suburbs*, No. 19. Translation my own, although I consulted that of Wood, Bockh, Sobelweski, Flower. The most notable difference in my translation is that I maintained the use of δεξιός and εὐώνυμος for both the outcome of the omen and the right or left wing. For the translation of ἐμ as ἔαν (the assimilation of the final ν to μ), see Buck, *The Greek Dialects* 1928, 96.

<sup>75</sup> Collins 2002, 5-36, 28.

<sup>76</sup> For the translation of εὐώνυμος see Chartraine 1999, 390. In contrast, the Mesopotamian omen tablets were intended for specially-educated experts.

<sup>77</sup> London Market, Christie’s, sale.no. 752 (*BAPD* 2301 = <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/8F41A32F-5A18-450E-B8E8-3B846C3F7132>). The bird is particularly striking because of the added red and white.

<sup>78</sup> Although it seems logical to assume that the hoplite is journeying to battle, the weight and cumbersome nature of this armor rendered the full panoply impractical to be worn on the journey to the battle. The mountainous

likely to be an eagle because of its added red and white, faces left which would imply that it is a dooming portent. The right/ left dichotomy, however, did not hold in all cases. For example, when Xenophon went out to meet Cyrus,<sup>79</sup> an eagle screeched but, even though it was on his right, his seer interpreted it as an inauspicious omen and was proved to be correct.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, different seers likely could interpret the same omen differently.<sup>81</sup> Hippocrates compared physicians to seers, in that “seers think that the same bird that they hold to be a good omen on the left is an unlucky one when on the right, while other seers maintain the opposite.”<sup>82</sup> In Greek divination, omens were interpreted more on the basis on their context and the seer’s judgment than strict adherence to any code.<sup>83</sup>

Unlike the Troilos scene, this scene lacks a mythical or literary parallel, so the omen cannot be clearly interpreted. For example, in his pre-battle narratives, Homer focused on arming and occasionally servants preparing the chariots.<sup>84</sup> I have only found one description of men going to battle on horseback (*ἵπποισι*) in Greek texts, but those men were the Dioskouroi so that detail most likely was specific to their connection with horses.<sup>85</sup>

The closest textual parallel to the Rider Amphorae comes from the Mesopotamian Tablet 108874 Tablet in the British Museum with an inscription linked to the Summa Alu omen series.<sup>86</sup> The tablet contains twenty five omens concerning the flight patterns of a falcon (*surdu*),

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terrain hoplites had to traverse to go to and from battle made it likely that hoplites did not journey in full panoply. Instead, the soldiers piled their arms on carts or packhorses and walked on foot as a group (Ober 1991, 173-196, 173-177).

<sup>79</sup> Xen. *Anab.* 6.1.22.

<sup>80</sup> Flower 2008, 198-199; Dillon 1996, 110.

<sup>81</sup> Flower 2008, 190, 196.

<sup>82</sup> Hippoc. *Morb.* 8. Cf. Flower 2008, 113.

<sup>83</sup> Beerden 2013, 137, 149-150, 167-169; Eidinow 2007, 25.; Flower 2008, 196, 113-114. Cf. Guinan 2002, 7-30, 21.

<sup>84</sup> Hom., *Il.* 3. 385-395; 3.396-3.98; 16. 156-173; 19. 430- 463. Fenik 1968, 29-30, 78-9, 191.

<sup>85</sup> Eur. *IA.* 1153-1154.

<sup>86</sup> The Summa Alu is the most comprehensive omen series and most likely included around 10,000 omens on 107 tablets, of which less than half survive (Freeman 1998, 5). It was developed over hundreds of years and

and the protases of the first eleven omens present moments similar to the horsemen scenes discussed above.<sup>87</sup> The first three omens begin with the protasis “If a man goes off on his errand”; the second three with “If a man goes on a journey”; the seventh through eleventh omens begin “If a man goes against an enemy.”<sup>88</sup> For example, the eleventh omen reads:

If a man goes against an enemy and a falcon circles from the left of the man to the back of the man and crosses to the right of the man \_ that man: wher(ever) he goes, he will be robbed of his property; his heart won't be satisfied.<sup>89</sup>

Although this strict codification of a bird's detailed flight trajectory in conjunction with a specific moment is a purely Mesopotamian phenomenon,<sup>90</sup> the Mesopotamian influence on Greek divinatory practice has been firmly established,<sup>91</sup> as has the motif of the hero's journey from Mesopotamian to Greek literature.<sup>92</sup> The Painter of Acropolis 606, the Tyrrhenian Group painters, and the many other vase painters who included horsemen with bird omens did so, not as a result of the BM 108874 omens specifically, but because of a common, popular tradition in the wider Mediterranean culture which emphasized the importance of recognizing omens on a journey.

Although the Brit. Mus.108874 tablet helps to explain why the theme of a horseman with a bird is so common, it does not aid in interpreting the omen on the amphora by the Circle of Lydos. In nearly all instances, the bird faced the same direction as the horse and rider.<sup>93</sup> The

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standardized in the seventh century. Unfortunately, the tablets concerning bird omens have not been published, so I have used the British Museum Tablet 108874. For the relationship between the Summa Alu and Brit. Mus. 108874, see De Zorzi 2009, 85-135.

<sup>87</sup> De Zorzi 2009, 85-135.

<sup>88</sup> De Zorzi 2009, 94-95.

<sup>89</sup> Trans. De Zorzi 2009, 94.

<sup>90</sup> Beerden 2014, 137, 149-150, 167-169. The inscription from Ephesus is the only attempt to codify bird signs in the Greek tradition, while there are over 10,000 omen tablets from Mesopotamia.

<sup>91</sup> For example, see Burkert 1995, 4; Dalley 1998, 1-17; Demand 2012, 6-7.

<sup>92</sup> West 1997 357.

<sup>93</sup> Exceptions: an amphora attributed to Lydos: New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 51.11.3 (*ABV*, 119, no. 6, *Paralipomena* 48, *BAPD* 310286); an olpe: Athens, Agora Museum, inv. no. P24946 (*BAPD* 351406, *Paralipomena*

fluid nature of Greek divination coupled with the impossibility of representing the flight patterns of birds on two-dimensional vase paintings renders interpreting omens without a known narrative context fruitless. Vase-painters seemed more concerned to show that some omen followed men embarking on journeys than to show specifically what the omen foreshadowed and this general uncertainty in the moment of a journey was what resonated with the viewers.

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192); an amphora attributed to Group E: Boston (MA), Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 1970.8 (*BAPD* 310353, *ABV*, 140, no. 2); a little master's lip cup: New York, Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 25.78.4 (*BAPD* 310289, *ABV*, 119, no. 9, *Paralipomena* 48); an amphora attributed to Affector: Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. F21 (*BAPD* 301336, *ABV*, 244, no. 48); an amphora attributed to Affector: Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen, inv. no. 1443 (*BAPD* 301315, *ABV*, 241, no. 27); a Siana cup attributed to the Corinthianizing Painter: New York (NY), Metropolitan Museum, inv. no. 01.8.6 (*BAPD* 300381, *ABV*, 51, no. 4, 681, *Paralipomena* 23); an eye-cup skyphos: Athens, Archaeological Society Museum, inv. no. 370 (*BAPD* 46547); an eye-cup: Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, inv. no. GR13.1937, (*BAPD* 12818).

## 2.0 VIEWING CONTEXT: THE FUNERAL

Viewers encountered these vases in two contexts: at the symposium and at the tomb. Metzger argues that the funerary Rider Amphorae were purely status symbols, expressing the deceased (and his family's) pride in being a member of the class of Hippeis.<sup>94</sup> Although the horsemen were hoplites and the bird, as I argue, was an omen rather than an attribute of Zeus, this conclusion still holds: the Rider Amphorae communicated wealth, military virtue, and status.<sup>95</sup> This emphasis on status and bravery on funerary vessels was not unique to the Rider Amphorae.

<sup>96</sup> In the early sixth century, the Horse-Head Amphorae were the most common grave goods, depicting just a large horse-head to communicate the horse and its implied social status.<sup>97</sup> Funerary vases with departing warriors emphasized the safe *oikos* life the hoplite was both defending and potentially sacrificing<sup>98</sup> and these, along with duels, highlighted *arête* and linked the deceased to a Homeric hero.<sup>99</sup> The bird omen on the Rider Amphorae provides a different dimension to the visual eulogy. It alludes to the future, its uncertainty, and the risks associated with battle, which renders the hoplites' individual decision to fight more difficult and virtuous. Furthermore, because omens were sent from gods, the presence of the bird behind the horseman

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<sup>94</sup> Metzger 1967, 158-159. Accepted by Rodríguez Pérez 2011, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Kelekna 2009, 6; Greenhalgh 1963, 4-7; Bugh 1972, 6-8.

<sup>96</sup> Marconi 2004, 29-32.

<sup>97</sup> Rodríguez Pérez 2011, 4; Birchall 1972, 46-63; Beazley 1951, 38-40; Boardman 1956, 24.

<sup>98</sup> Lissarrague 1990, 43-47. Marconi 2004, 37, 40; Matheson 2010, 23-36, 26-27, 32-33; Lissarrague 1989, 39-51.

<sup>99</sup> Lissarrague 1990, 72-73; Marconi 2004, 32-35.



shows that the gods were, whether in a positive or negative way, entwined with the horseman's fate, which may or may not have been comforting. The moment of a journey could have had a secondary importance as a metaphor for the journey of death, particularly as Greek attitudes became less pessimistic in the sixth century.<sup>100</sup>

## 2.1 VIEWING CONTEXT: THE TOMB

Although they represented the dead, the Rider Amphorae, like other funerary gifts, ultimately communicated with the living. In the symposium, however, the Rider Amphorae and other vases (most frequently cups) with horseman and birds spoke to those whom they represented- elite men who served as hoplites, squires, cavalry, and travelers.

The Rider Amphorae, while the most common examples of horsemen and birds, were not the only iteration of that theme. A representative example of a non-hoplite horseman can be seen on a cup by the Corinthianizing Painter.<sup>101</sup> The composition of the tondo is similar to that of the Rider Amphorae, except there is only one horseman, a bearded man with a cap wearing a tunic and carrying a spear, and the bird flying behind him is a similarly vague omen. The horseman in the tondo is not the only one on the cup and it is not the only one to receive a bird portent. On the obverse, there are two horseman outfitted similarly to the horseman in the tondo, except that the one on the left wears a Corinthian helmet with a small crest. Facing each other, they appear about to engage in combat. The bird behind the helmeted horseman faces left, in a rare case when it faces the opposite direction of the horse and rider. This, along with the two hoplites

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<sup>100</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 1981, 15-40.; Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, 230-231.

<sup>101</sup> Siana Cup attributed to the Corinthianizing: Painter Marseilles, Musee Borely, inv. no. 7000 (BAPD 300380; ABV, 51, no. 3 = <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/869CF790-A495-415C-B346-9789FCE2CDC9>).

standing who render the helmeted horseman outnumbered, makes the interpretation that the bird is a dooming portent is attractive.

A symposium scene graces the reverse of the cup: two men recline on a *klinos*, attended by a figure in a Lydianizing tunic with a Phrygian bonnet and a woman, probably a *hetaira*. The program of this cup serves as a convenient microcosm for the viewing of horsemen on vessels other than funerary Rider Amphorae: the images of battle and the journey to it are placed in the context of the symposium, just as vessels with horsemen would have been used in the symposium. In general, martial themes pervaded sympotic vessels to emphasize bonds between the symposiasts based on their shared experience and to remind them of their virtues.<sup>102</sup>

In all of these scenes, regardless of the identity of the horseman, the presence and placement of the bird remained the same, and there is an equal weight given to the experience of youthful squires and experienced hoplites, echoing the egalitarian nature of the symposium. Both would have identified with travelling to the battlefield, mundane in comparison to the actual fighting but stressful in terms of its with uncertainty, highlighted by the presence of an ambiguous bird omen on the vases.

## 2.2 CONCLUSION

The close relationship between divination and the future makes portents particularly useful for pictorial narrative.<sup>103</sup> Artists from every epoch and culture have struggled and will continue to

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<sup>102</sup> Murray 1994, 96-97.

<sup>103</sup> This does not mean that societies which turned to divination were fatalistic because knowing the future is useless if one lacks any hope of altering it. Instead, many omens communicated a value judgment as to whether a course or time (as in the case of hiera battle sacrifices) of action was approved by the gods, which was closely

struggle to represent a sequential series of events in a single two dimensional plane.<sup>104</sup> Many sixth-century vase painters confronted the problem with monoscenic narrative.<sup>105</sup> This paralleled the experience of real-life humans who lacked information about the future and turned to divination in part to attain that information. In an analogous way, vase-painters used divination as a way to include more information about the future in a monoscenic, compressed narrative. This is unlike in the written record when mythical and historical figures used divination to aid in the decision making process:<sup>106</sup> most of the horsemen with birds and in the majority of other scenes with bird omens, the internal figures do not even see the omen. That the omen so often goes unnoticed by the diagetic audience could hint at a broader fatalistic view of fate or alternatively that the gods maintained a substantial presence human in life even when humans weren't paying attention.

Bird omens were effective narrative devices because the viewers, layman diviners, had a basic understanding of the tenets of augury. This understanding came partly from Greek myth, as seen on the Theseus Painter skyphos with its parallels in Homer and Aeschylus, and partly from a popular Mediterranean tradition, which one sees on the horseman vases with their parallels to the British Museum 108874 tablet and the Summa Alu omen tablets. But the omens

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related with whether that action would have a positive or negative outcome, either in the immediate or long-term sense. The majority of historical omens given by the Oracle of Delphi, for example, were answers to inquiries about the best way to honor the gods, rather than inquiries about future events. This information would then be used to inform religious practices in the future. For more discussion on divination and the future, see Annus 2015, 1-6; Flower 2008, 76-78.

<sup>104</sup> Kafalenos 2006, 2.

<sup>105</sup> Giuliani 2001, 131-2.

<sup>106</sup> In fact, the real efficacy of divination was that it provided a platform for individuals to begin discussing the merits and drawbacks of a particular decision (Eidinow 2013, 21-39, 31-36; Flower 2008, 6, 244). Beerden (2014, 25-6) recognizes that not all portents were used to make decisions. Those who went to Dodona did so to confirm that they were making the right choice (Eidinow 2007, 5, 235). Flower emphasized the seer's key role in the decision-making and that divination provided humans with the ability to better their lot by acting differently (Flower 2008, 244). Most of Xenophon's dream omens come when he was at a loss for what to do next (Eidinow 2007, 12-14; Xen. *Anab.* 2.2.3; 3.1.41; 6.2.21; 6.4.15).

were not just recognized by the viewers; they impacted their interpretation. On vases with ambush of Troilos and other mythical scenes, the omens emphasized dramatic irony. On the Rider Amphorae and other unidentified horsemen scenes, the omens heightened both the uncertainty and the gravity of embarking on a journey, especially to the battlefield. This elevated the virtue of the horsemen for their living relatives at the funeral and provided a situation with which aristocratic men could identify at the symposium.

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