

THE TIPPLING SERPENT IN THE ART OF LAKONIA AND BEYOND

ABSTRACT

The iconographic scheme of a snake drinking from a cup appears on a series of stone reliefs and terracotta plaques from Lakonia depicting seated figures, now generally interpreted as dedications to local heroes. It is argued here that the drinking snake in association with human figures first appeared on Lakonian monuments during the 5th century B.C., perhaps as a way of stressing the close association of the snake with the hero and, by extension, his friendly union with the chthonic powers. This iconographic motif, which developed within the Lakonian series, was disseminated beyond Lakonia and appeared on other types of monuments, where it functioned primarily as a heroic emblem.

The iconographic scheme of a snake drinking from a vessel is found frequently on a series of stone reliefs and moldmade terracotta plaques from Lakonia that depict snakes in close association with seated male figures.¹ These monuments, which range in date from the second half of the 6th century B.C. to Roman times, show some stylistic development but little typological or iconographic variation; the depiction of the drinking snake, however, undergoes fundamental changes. In this article I describe the evolution and possible meanings of the drinking-snake scheme in association with human figures, which first appeared on Lakonian reliefs and plaques during the 5th century B.C. The motif functioned as a heroic emblem that was later extended to other types of monuments beyond the geographic borders of Lakonia.

A good example of the scheme appears on a fragmentary stone relief dated to the early 4th century B.C. (Fig. 1).² Inside a *naiskos* sits a man in a

1. For lists of the stone reliefs, several of which remain substantially unpublished, see Dressel and Milchhöfer 1877; Tod and Wace 1906; Andronikos 1956; Stibbe 1991. See also Hibler 1993; Salapata 1993. The terracotta plaques are also largely unpublished, but see Salapata 1992. I am

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the kylix reproduced here as Fig. 8.

2. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 683: Tod and Wace 1906, pp. 107, 201–202, fig. 11; Stibbe 1991, p. 11, fig. 19. Because of its superior artistic quality, this relief has been considered a work commissioned from an Attic sculptor: Stibbe 1991, p. 11, n. 45.



Figure 1. Stone relief, early 4th century B.C. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 683. Photo courtesy Archaeological Museum, Sparta

relaxed pose, facing left, with both head and upper body in three-quarter view. He is bearded and has short hair. One corner of his himation, loosely wrapped around his legs, hangs down over his left shoulder. His left arm rests on the broad, curved top of the chair and in his outstretched right hand he holds a kantharos. A snake turns its head toward the rim of the cup, obviously approaching to drink from it.

Fragmentary terracotta plaques from the same period found in a deposit by the church of Ayia Paraskevi at Amyklai (Fig. 2:a, b) bear a similar image of a man seated on a chair and holding out a kantharos, with a coiling snake turning its head toward the rim.³ Similar plaques from the site sometimes include a young male *oinochoos* standing in front of a man with a jug and strainer, ready to serve him; in the background can be seen the lower part of a shield, which characterizes the man as a warrior (Fig. 2:c).⁴ The same combination of man and servant appears on a stone relief from Gytheion, dated to the Hellenistic period.⁵ A 4th-century B.C. stone relief in the Sparta Museum shows a seated man, exceptionally represented frontally, with a scepter in his left hand and a phiale in his right, out of which an upright snake is drinking.⁶

While a snake is present on the Lakonian stone reliefs from the beginning of the series, it was not originally depicted as drinking from the cup or even positioned near it, a point well illustrated by the earliest of the reliefs, discovered in 1877 near Chrysapha (Fig. 3).⁷ Depicted here is a couple facing right, seated on an elaborate throne with supports shaped like a lion's legs. The man, in the foreground, holds a large kantharos in his outstretched right hand and extends his left hand forward, the palm open and facing the viewer. His head is also turned toward the viewer; he has large almond-shaped eyes and on his lips appears the "Archaic smile." The strong projection of his chin was most likely intended to render a beard, originally picked out in paint.⁸ His hair falls in long braids down his chest and back. He wears sandals, a long chiton, and a himation. The chiton, represented by vertical folds, is visible only immediately above the

3. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6230/14, 6230/15, 6230/16, 6230/17.

4. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6229/1: Stibbe 1976, p. 15, n. 42, pl. 4:2; Salapata 1992, p. 998, pl. 77:a.

5. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 1002: Le Roy 1982, pp. 279–281, figs. 1, 2; Salapata 1993, p. 192, fig. 60.

6. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 5408: Mitropoulou 1977, pp. 134–136, fig. 61.

7. Berlin, Pergamon Museum 731: Blümel 1963, pp. 22–25, figs. 42–44.

8. Dressel and Milchhöfer 1877, pp. 304, 445 and n. 2; Milchhöfer 1879, pp. 128–129. The beard is not easily rendered in frontal faces.

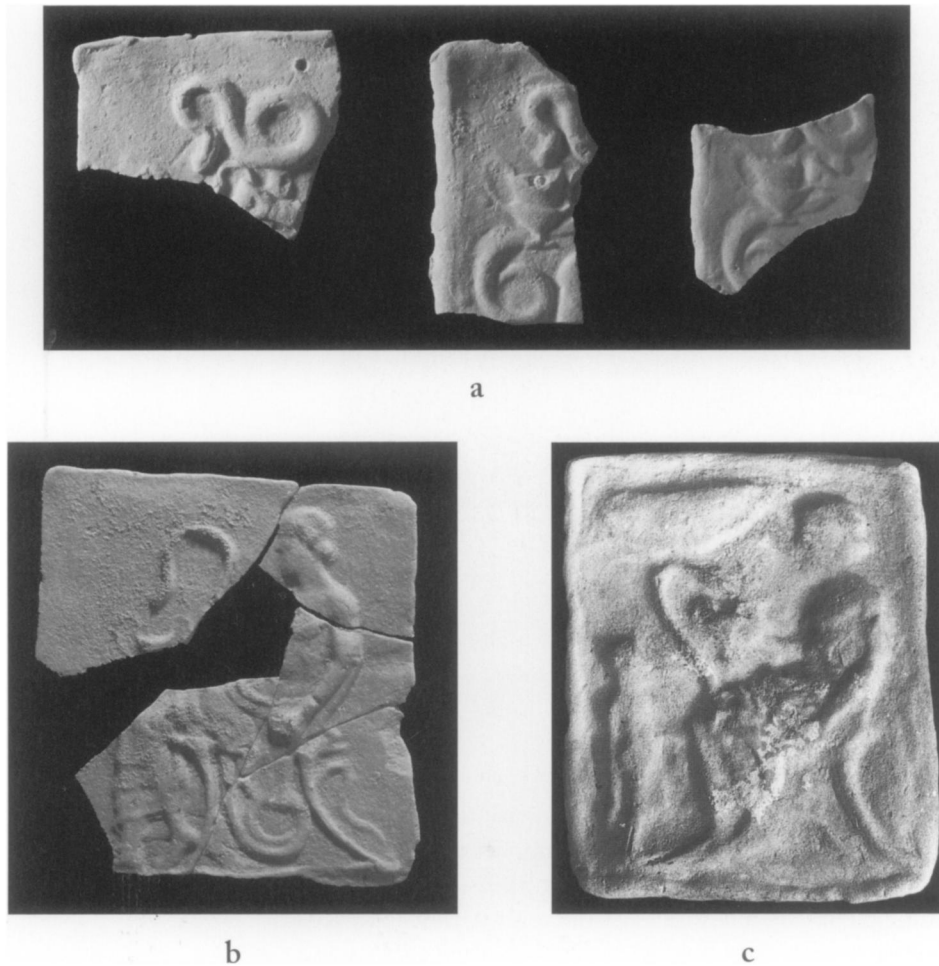


Figure 2. Three generations of terracotta plaque fragments from a single mold (a) and terracotta plaques (b, c) from Ayia Paraskevi, Amyklai, late 5th–4th century. Sparta, Archaeological Museum (a) 6230/15, 6230/16, 6230/17; (b) 6230/14; (c) 6229/1. Photos G. Salapata

ankles; it is very likely, however, that a sleeve line was rendered in paint on his right forearm. The himation, indicated by incised oblique folds, leaves his right shoulder uncovered and after passing over his left shoulder hangs over his back in a stiff bundle.

The woman, in the background, is shown in lower relief and entirely in profile. She wears a long chiton and is shod in shoes with upturned toes. With her left hand she draws the edge of her himation away from her face in the so-called *anakalypsis* gesture; in her right hand she holds a pomegranate. In front of the couple, in the space under the kantharos, stand tiny figures of a youth and a maiden, both holding offerings: the youth, in front, carries a cock and probably an egg, the maiden a flower and a pomegranate. From beneath the throne a large bearded snake curls upward behind the seated figures.⁹ The Chrysapha relief can be dated to

9. A snake rises behind the throne on a similar but slightly more advanced relief from Sparta (Sparta, Archaeological Museum 3: Tod and Wace 1906, p. 104, fig. 2; Dressel and Milchhöfer 1877, pp. 307–309, 448, pl. XXII). On a much later relief, dating to the

4th century B.C. or later, two snakes are depicted behind a seated man who, exceptionally, is not holding a drinking cup (Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6003: Christou 1963, p. 85, pl. 94:γ).



Figure 3. Stone relief from the vicinity of Chrysapha, ca. 540 B.C. Berlin, Pergamon Museum 731.

Photo J. Liepe, courtesy Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung

the third quarter of the 6th century B.C., most likely around 540 B.C.¹⁰ The “Archaic smile,” the stiff poses and unnatural proportions of the figures (such as the extremely long left arm and the large palm of the man), and the crowding of the picture by filling all available space with iconographic elements all support an early date.¹¹

Another relief from slightly later in the Archaic period depicts an enthroned couple in a similar pose, but facing left, with a snake wriggling in front of them (Fig. 4).¹² The placement of the snake in this position was most likely intended to provide balance to the composition, since the figures of the offering-bearers are no longer present. In this case the snake is very close to the kantharos, but its head reaches up only to the foot of the cup.¹³ On other Archaic reliefs, the snake rises higher, holding its head over the rim of the kantharos (Fig. 5).¹⁴

10. Häfner (1965, pp. 69–70), comparing it with contemporary bronze work, placed the Chrysapha relief toward the end of the 6th century B.C. and attributed the Ionic influences clearly seen in the work to the presence at Amyklai of the Magnesian artist Bathykles. Her date, however, seems too late.

11. Dressel and Milchhöfer 1877, p. 447; Häfner 1965, p. 68. The same *horror vacui* might have been the reason for the irregular border of the relief, which closely follows the outline of the figures.

12. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 415; Dressel and Milchhöfer 1877, pp. 309–310, pl. 23:D; Hibler 1992, p. 116, fig. 34.

13. An unpublished relief in the Sparta Museum from about the same period depicts a very similar scene but with the man seated alone and facing right; the snake reaches slightly higher, up to the bottom of the bowl of the kantharos.

14. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6517, dated ca. 520 B.C. (Steinhauer 1977, p. 166, pl. 146:x; Hibler 1992, p. 118, fig. 36). See also two near repli-

cas: Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6518 (Steinhauer 1977, p. 166, pl. 146:β; Hibler 1992, p. 118, fig. 37) and 451 (Hibler 1992, p. 116, fig. 33). Contrary to the view expressed by Stibbe (1991, p. 11), the snake here is not clearly shown as if it is going to drink from the kantharos. Cf. also another relief in the Sparta Museum, dated to the early 5th century (no inv. no.: Delivorrias 1970, pp. 135–137, pl. 132:β; Stibbe 1991, p. 14, fig. 9); and two archaizing reliefs, one in the Dimitsana Museum (inv. 1) and another in the Sparta Museum (Stibbe 1991, p. 11, figs. 23, 24).



Figure 4 (left). Stone relief, ca. 530 B.C.
Sparta, Archaeological Museum 415.
Dressel and Milchhöfer 1877, pl. 23:D



Figure 5 (right). Stone relief, ca. 520 B.C.
Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6517.
Photo courtesy Archaeological Museum,
Sparta

A second relief found near Chrysapha represents a bearded man, exceptionally shown standing rather than seated, wearing a himation and holding a slightly tilted kantharos in his right hand and a fruit (pomegranate?) in his left.¹⁵ An upright snake, coiling in front of him, places its head above one handle of the cup but, as in all previous examples, it does not appear to be drinking. This relief probably dates to the first half of the 5th century B.C.

The relief illustrated in Figure 6 is a good example of the iconographic type as it developed in the High Classical period, and it is here that we see for the first time the snake clearly drinking out of a cup.¹⁶ The man, with short beard and cropped hair, is now seated on a chair rather than a throne, facing left. His pose is more relaxed, his left arm resting casually on the back of the chair. The drapery is simplified to a single garment, a himation, wrapped loosely around his lower body and leaving his upper body bare. He holds in his extended right hand a flat object, presumably a phiale, while a snake, coiling under the chair, rises in front of him, touching its head to the rim of the bowl and obviously drinking from it.

Several other reliefs with representations of a drinking snake belong to the Hellenistic or Roman periods. In one example (Fig. 7) a man holds a kantharos that now has a distinctly Hellenistic shape, out of which an upright snake is drinking.¹⁷ The bearded man is here accompanied by another, younger man who stands next to him with his right hand on his hip.

15. Athens, National Museum 1417: Tod and Wace 1906, pp. 104–105, fig. 5; Milchhöfer 1881, p. 294, pl. 17:2; Stibbe 1991, pp. 5, 11, fig. 16.

16. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6519: Steinhauer 1977, p. 166, pl. 145 (second half of the 5th century). For the style, cf. an Attic relief in the Vatican, dated ca. 410 B.C.: Fuchs 1961, pl. 74.

17. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 3360: Mitropoulou 1977, pp. 56–57,

fig. 16; Hibler 1993, p. 201 (3rd century B.C.); Stibbe 1991, p. 11, fig. 18. Stibbe is certainly wrong in dating it to the end of the 5th century. Cf. also two other, probably Hellenistic, reliefs in which the snake drinks from the kantharos: one with a naked *oinochos* (see above, n. 5); and another, inscribed, with two adorants (Sparta, Archaeological Museum, no inv. no.: Schröder 1904, pp. 42–44, fig. 5; Tod and Wace 1906, p. 106, fig. 9).



Since the standing figure seems to be neither an adorant nor an attendant of the seated man, he must be a companion, or perhaps his son.¹⁸ The inscription along the top, most probably to be restored as “Choiras, son of Choir[as],” suggests a shift in the character of the Lakonian stone reliefs: from votive offerings to traditional heroes (as I argue below), to offerings for the recently deceased, who are here, as commonly in the Hellenistic period, honored as heroes.¹⁹

From the internal evidence of the Lakonian reliefs it appears that the image of the drinking snake is a secondary development. On the earliest reliefs the snake was placed behind the seated couple. When, a little later, the field in front of the seated figures was cleared of the diminutive offering-bearers, the snake moved to the front and, inevitably, closer to the cup held by the man. The snake remained, however, an isolated element in the composition, with no clear role, and it could be depicted with its head placed either below or above the rim of the kantharos. In other words, in the Archaic examples there is no clear indication that the snake is going to, or was ever intended to, drink out of the kantharos. Eventually, however,

18. Le Roy's suggestion (1982, p. 286) that the figure represents an adorant is not persuasive, since he is depicted neither at a smaller scale nor in front of the seated man, as adorants usually are, but standing by his side; most importantly, he does not make a gesture of adoration. It is also unlikely that we have here a depiction of the Dioskouroi, as Mitropoulou (1977, p. 56) suggests: while it is true that the absence of a beard on one of the figures

is an attribute occasionally used to distinguish between the mortal Kastor and the immortal Polydeukes (as for example on the chest of Kypselos: Paus. 5.19.2), the very young age of the standing youth when compared with the seated man is incompatible with their identification as twin brothers.

19. Hibler 1993, p. 201. Cf. a 2nd-century B.C. relief in the Dimitsana Museum (inv. 344) and a Roman relief

Figure 6 (left). Stone relief, second half of the 5th century B.C. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6519.

Photo courtesy Archaeological Museum, Sparta

Figure 7 (right). Stone relief, 3rd century B.C. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 3360. Photo courtesy Archaeological Museum, Sparta

in the Piraeus Museum, both with inscriptions: Stibbe 1991, p. 11, figs. 20, 21. For the heroization of private individuals in the Hellenistic period, see most recently Hughes (1999), who argues that this cult was not viewed as incompatible with traditional hero cult. In fact, the heroization of contemporaries was seen by the Greeks more as a continuation of traditional practice than as a decline.



Figure 8. Fragmentary kylix from Ayia Paraskevi, Amyklai, 5th century B.C.
Stibbe 1994, p. 82, fig. 14

sometime around the middle of the 5th century B.C., the snake was brought into direct association with the drinking cup, and consequently became more closely linked with the man holding it. The snake was now regularly represented with its head turned toward the opening of the cup, with the obvious intention of drinking from it.

From this point forward the iconographic formula of the drinking snake became a standard feature of Lakonian art.²⁰ It even appears in an abbreviated, emblematic form, as a freestanding kantharos with a snake coming to drink from it, on 5th-century B.C. kylikes from the Ayia Paraskevi deposit at Amyklai (Fig. 8), the same deposit that produced many of the terracotta plaques with seated figures.²¹ These images, even when they appear in isolation, should be interpreted as excerpts from larger scenes that included a seated man.²²

EARLIER OCCURRENCES OF THE TIPPLING SERPENT

The iconographic scheme of a snake drinking out of a vessel was not entirely new, but had been known in the Mediterranean since the Bronze Age, found in cultic or funerary contexts in Minoan and Mycenaean Greece, Cyprus, and the Levant. Relief snakes, for example, crawl up several of the so-called snake tubes found in Minoan Crete, and similar examples are known from Cyprus and the area of Syro-Palestine.²³ These snake tubes

20. Cf. also a late-4th-century stone relief from neighboring Messene: Themelis 1998, p. 185, fig. 68.

21. Stibbe 1994, p. 80, figs. 11–14. Conrad Stibbe has kindly informed me that more such sherds have been found in other deposits, for example, in the “Heroon by the river Eurotas”

(for which see Wace 1905–1906).

22. Cf. an early-5th-century fragmentary kylix depicting a seated man with a kantharos and a writhing snake beneath it (Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6116: Stibbe 1976, pp. 13, 16, n. 58, pl. 5:1; Pipili 1987, p. 63). As expected because of the date of the

vase, the snake is not yet approaching to drink.

23. Crete: Zervos 1956, pp. 32, 49, pls. 469–471, 603, 790, 791; *PM IV.1*, pp. 140–147, fig. 110:b–f; Gesell 1976. Cyprus: Karageorghis 1972. Syro-Palestine: *PM IV.1*, p. 167, fig. 129; Branigan 1969, p. 38.

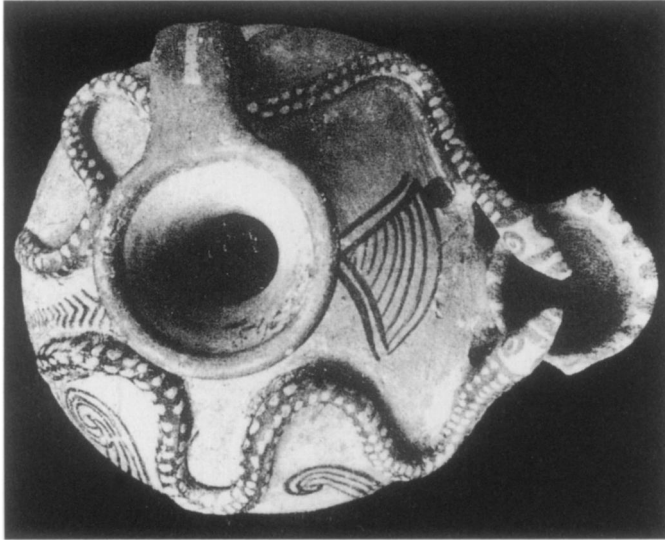


Figure 9. Mycenaean jug from Ialysos with two snakes drinking from the spout. Jacopi 1930–1931, p. 321, fig. 68

are cylindrical stands with two opposing snakelike handles, used in the cult of the “goddess with up-raised hands,” who was also connected with snakes. The function of the tubes was not to house snakes, as originally thought, but to support cups, usually made separately, in which offerings could have been placed. The snakes may have been thought of as sharing in these offerings, an interpretation supported by an unusual example of Late Minoan IIIC date found at Kavousi in eastern Crete. Here the cup has two relief snakes crossing the interior, implying that they would have continuously partaken of the offerings, either solid or liquid, placed within the vessel.²⁴

Jugs decorated with coiling snakes approaching to drink from the opening are found in both Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece. Small, perforated examples from Knossos have relief snakes climbing up the side and extending their heads to the opening.²⁵ Jugs found in cemeteries at Ialysos and Naxos are decorated on the shoulder with two relief snakes approaching to drink from a strainer spout or a cup that takes the place of a spout (Fig. 9).²⁶ Others from graves on Kos and at Perati feature one or two painted snakes, again shown drinking from spouts.²⁷ In all of these cases the notion behind the image is similar to that of the snake tubes, with the difference that the snakes on the jugs would have been thought

24. Gesell, Coulson, and Day 1991, p. 162, pl. 63:d; Gesell 1999, p. 284, pl. LXI:d, e. Similar cylindrical vessels, but with cups attached to their sides, have been found at Knossos: *PM IV.1*, pp. 140–142, figs. 109, 111. There is no evidence, however, that real snakes would have been served by these cups, as Evans believed. Gesell (1999, p. 286) suggests that some of the cups placed on snake tubes held food to attract small rodents or insects as bait for the

snakes used in the ritual.

25. *PM IV.1*, pp. 155–156, fig. 119. Cf. the snake writhing around a perforated vessel in the form of a wild honeycomb: *PM IV.1*, pp. 155–156, fig. 118.

26. Jacopi 1930–1931, p. 321, fig. 68; Desborough 1964, pp. 13, 40, 150, pl. 7:c, d; *PM IV.1*, p. 164, fig. 122. Such jugs with strainer or cuplike spouts were common during the Late Helladic IIIC period in the

Dodecanese, Naxos, and Perati, areas that had close links during the middle phase of this period (Desborough’s “Aegean Koine”: 1964, pp. 20, 228).

27. Mountjoy 1993, pp. 101–102, nos. 270, 271; Iakovides 1969–1970, vol. 1, pp. 332–333, fig. 94, pls. 21 (no. 553), 102 (no. 280). Cf. another example from Ialysos: *PM IV.1*, p. 164, fig. 124.

of as partaking specifically of liquid offerings. The illusion would have been even more realistic when the jug was tilted for pouring. Because of the funerary context of the Mycenaean jugs, it can be assumed that the offerings would have been made in honor of the dead. Indeed, one of the "strainer-spouted jugs" from Perati had contained a mixture of milk and honey, a particularly appropriate offering to the dead.²⁸

An exceptional find from the Mycenaean mainland closely associates the drinking snake with a divine figure. It is a fragment from a large Late Helladic IIIB terracotta figure found at the Sanctuary of Apollo Amyklaios in Lakonia during the excavations conducted by Tsountas in 1890.²⁹ The left hand of the figure is preserved, grasping the stem of a kylix; on the wrist are the remains of a snake, which approaches the cup, presumably to drink from it. The figure holding the cup is almost certainly a divinity, and because of its large size the fragment might have belonged to a cult statue.³⁰

The iconographic scheme of the drinking snake survived into the Geometric period exclusively in a funerary context. Geometric vases, especially from the Athenian Dipylon cemetery, are often decorated with painted or relief snakes that writhe not just on handles and shoulders but also inside the rim.³¹ As chthonic creatures, the snakes are generally believed to reflect the funerary purpose of these vases, an interpretation reinforced by the funeral scenes often depicted on the bodies of the vases.³²

The Geometric image of the snake near the rim of a vessel was carried on into later periods. A Protoattic jug from the Kerameikos, apparently based on a Lakonian bronze prototype and made especially for funerary use, as shown by the *prothesis* scene painted on the body, has two snakes in the round emerging from its mouth.³³ The snakes would have appeared to be drinking from the liquid when the jug was tilted for pouring. Finally, a Late Corinthian oinochoe of the 6th century B.C., which also appears to copy a metal original, bears on its handle a relief snake that divides into two snakes crawling along the rim.³⁴

28. Iakovides 1969–1970, vol. 2, pp. 59, 86, 232 (no. 553); Mountjoy 1993, p. 128. For the mixture of milk and honey offered to the dead, see *Od.* 10.519.

29. Tod and Wace 1906, p. 244, no. 794; Demakopoulou 1982, pp. 55–56, pl. 26, no. 68α, β. The original height of the figure would have been ca. 0.55 m if standing, ca. 0.40 m if seated.

30. Demakopoulou 1982, pp. 87–88.

31. See, e.g., *PM* IV.1, p. 165, fig. 125; Ahlberg 1971, figs. 33, 36; *Kerameikos* VI.2, pp. 428–435, nos. 20–23, pls. 10–15. Cf. a flask from a grave in Miletos with a snake in relief around the neck, its head next to the opening:

PM IV.1, p. 164, fig. 123; and some pitcher-olpai with a high handle decorated with two ridges shaped like snakes and extending partway along the rim: Davison 1961, p. 59, figs. 72, 73.

Two oversized vessels from an Attic grave also bear relief snakes: one, a pitcher, has a dotted snake touching the mouth of the vase with its head as if to drink; the other, an oinochoe, has a similar dotted snake on the handle: Briese and Docter 1994, pp. 2, 4, figs. 1, 2, 4–6. A regular-sized pitcher from the same grave has two relief snakes on the handle, which again turn their heads to the mouth of the vase: Briese and Docter 1994, pp. 4–7, figs. 7–10.

32. Coldstream 1977, pp. 117–118;

Küster 1913, pp. 40–43.

33. Demargne 1964, pp. 336–337, figs. 428, 429; *Kerameikos* VI.2, pp. 175, 456–459, no. 49, pls. 38–40.

34. London, British Museum B39: Payne 1931, p. 214, pl. 39:3. Two isolated examples from a much later period (perhaps Hellenistic or Early Roman) come from the temenos of Poseidon at Isthmia: Broneer 1955, p. 134, no. 30, pl. 52:d; *Isthmia* II, p. 29, pl. 14:c; Michaud 1971, p. 848, fig. 103. Both are kraters with relief snakes slithering on the handles, their heads directed toward the interior. These are likely to have been employed as cult vessels in connection with a chthonic cult.

THE MEANING OF THE TIPLING SERPENT SCHEME

The first appearance of the drinking-snake motif after the Archaic period is in the 5th-century Lakonian reliefs discussed above. The snake is now part of a larger scene including figures and, as we have seen, the scheme is the result of an internal iconographic development within the Lakonian series. The combination of two previously separate iconographic elements, kantharos and snake, into the scheme of the drinking snake cannot, however, be considered entirely accidental, or the result of a misunderstanding of the earlier type in which the snake was situated behind the throne.³⁵ The notion of the drinking snake was probably familiar to the local community from the survival of earlier artifacts, such as the Mycenaean cult figure from the Amyklaion and local Geometric vases with snakes on the rim, and possibly also metal vessels, now lost.³⁶ The image would thus have been easily accepted by informed viewers who could comprehend and appreciate it.³⁷ Moreover, the fact that it enjoyed such a long life in Lakonia suggests that the local people must somehow have been familiar not just with the visual vocabulary but also with the ideas that it conveyed. What notions, then, would the tipling serpent have suggested?

An early scholarly opinion regarded the figure holding the kantharos in these scenes as a deceased man and the snake as an incarnation of his soul, which goes to drink from the cup in place of the dead man himself.³⁸ Support for this interpretation was sought in the frequent depiction of snakes near graves, either as live animals or as decoration.³⁹ Since the snake dwells in recesses of the earth and is commonly seen near graves, it is not surprising that it has been connected with the dead. Rather than representing an incarnation of the dead man's soul, however, the snake by the grave should be seen as a guardian, a role these reptiles often assume

35. As Tod and Wace (1906, p. 110) and Andronikos (1956, p. 298) have argued.

36. See, e.g., a fragmentary Geometric vase with a painted snake on the shoulder and a relief snake climbing up one handle: Droop 1929, p. 59, fig. 36. Cf. also the jug from the Athenian Kerameikos based on a Lakonian metal vessel (see above, n. 33).

37. Cf. Dentzer 1982, p. 499; Bérard 1983, p. 10.

38. DarSag II.1 (1892), pp. 408–409, s.v. Draco (E. Pottier); Furtwängler 1883, pp. 24–26; Elderkin 1924, p. 9; Harrison 1899, pp. 214–215; [1922] 1955, pp. 325–326; Nilsson 1955, p. 199; Egli 1982, pp. 105–113; Effenberger 1972, p. 136; Küster 1913, pp. 40–41, 62–72, 573–574. Wide

(1909), in support of the argument that the snake embodies the soul of the deceased, cited Geometric vases with painted and relief snakes, as well as a Cretan altar of Hellenistic date with two snakes drinking from a bowl placed on top. At best, however, the Geometric examples show only the association of the snake with the dead, and in no way prove that the snake represents an incarnation of the soul. Küster (1913, pp. 81–82, n. 7), realizing that the man in the Lakonian reliefs is unlikely to be feeding his own soul, suggested that in later periods the scheme was used without reference to the original symbolism. Kontoleon (1965, pp. 372–373, n. 87) explained the image as an indication that the man belonged to the world of the dead, with the snake in his grave

now drinking instead of him. Elderkin's interpretation of the Lakonian reliefs as allusions to rebirth and immortality (1924, p. 15) led him to explain the image of the drinking snake as a reference to Dionysos, who is offering the cup of immortality containing his blood/wine to the soul-snake.

39. *LIMC* VII, 1994, p. 433, s.v. Polyxene (O. Touchefeu-Meynier); Vermeule 1979, p. 20, fig. 15; Harrison [1922] 1955, pp. 328–329, figs. 96, 97. Snakes are also depicted on Archaic Klazomenian terracotta sarcophagi: Küster 1913, pp. 47–49; Egli 1982, p. 106; cf. a terracotta chest of the late 7th century B.C. from Thebes, with two snakes on the cover: Boehlau 1888, pp. 356–358.

in myth.⁴⁰ Another possibility is that the snake became a symbol of death because in Greece, as in many other cultures, it was associated with the earth to which all mortals return.⁴¹ In still other cases it could embody the Erinyes, the angry spirit of the dead.⁴²

Seiffert argued convincingly against the interpretation of the snake as the theriomorphic appearance of the soul of the honored dead.⁴³ He rightly remarked that, if this were the case, the appearance on several Lakonian reliefs of two figures but only one snake would have been awkward.⁴⁴ He wondered why the dead would appear in the same scene in both human and animal form, and why the two forms would interact closely with one another in the examples where the man allows the snake to drink from his kantharos.⁴⁵ Instead, he saw in the snake a separate being, a *daimon* serving the great Earth divinity who was originally manifested in this form.⁴⁶ Because the *daimon* inspired fear and awe, he had to be placated with offerings of drink.⁴⁷

Support for Seiffert's view, at least in a Lakonian context, may be found in an early-5th-century B.C. relief from Charouda in the western Mani.⁴⁸ It portrays a young warrior in a short chiton and greaves standing in front of a large upright snake. The warrior is preparing to deposit his shield on the ground, where his Corinthian helmet already lies. In this case it seems certain that the snake does not embody the warrior's soul, but is an independent, superhuman being, venerated by him.⁴⁹ Andronikos considered the relief a dedication to a hero or *daimon* appearing in the form of a snake, and interpreted the warrior as a representation of the dedicator.⁵⁰ A similar upright snake appears on another Lakonian relief, in front of a standing youth who holds a spear.⁵¹ Finally, several other Lakonian reliefs,

40. Snakes guarded the Golden Fleece, the Apples of the Hesperides, and fountains and springs, probably because they were considered *genii loci*, autochthonous beings: DarSag II.1 (1892), pp. 406–408, s.v. Draco (E. Potier); Lacroix 1965, pp. 121–122. According to Pliny (*HN* 16.85), the snake was the guardian and familiar spirit of the dead man: Küster 1913, pp. 68–71, 112–113, n. 7; Dentzer 1982, p. 497. For the snake as a guardian in sanctuaries, see Bevan 1986, pp. 261–262.

41. Langefass-Vuduroglu 1973, p. 81; Kontoleon 1965, pp. 389–390. Herodotos (1.78.3) reports that the snake was considered a “child of the earth,” and indeed many mythological snake monsters, such as Typhon, Ladon, Echidna, and Hydra, claimed the goddess Earth as their mother or grandmother.

42. Küster 1913, pp. 71–72. Cf. the Tyrrhenian amphora, formerly in the Bourguignon Collection in Naples,

showing the slaying of Eriphyle on top of a tomb out of which arises a large snake: *LIMC* I, 1981, p. 548, no. 3, s.v. Alkmaion (I. Krauskopf).

43. Seiffert 1911, pp. 114–120; cf. Rhomaïos 1914, pp. 213–217, 226; Dentzer 1982, pp. 496–497. The snake does not appear on funerary stelai before the Hellenistic period.

44. On Geometric and Archaic vases there are usually two snakes: Rhomaïos 1914, pp. 219–220.

45. Seiffert 1911, pp. 117, 120–121; Rhomaïos 1914, p. 218; Kontoleon 1970, p. 32.

46. Seiffert 1911, pp. 120–126; cf. Küster (1913, pp. 81–82, n. 7), who partly agrees with him. *Drakontes* sometimes seem to represent *daimones* who were thought to have existed since olden times, and whose cult was taken over by the Olympian deities; see, e.g., the battle of Apollo against Python for control of Delphi: Küster 1913, p. 87;

Harrison [1922] 1955, pp. 18, 332–339, 358.

47. Seiffert 1911, pp. 121–126; Rhomaïos 1914, pp. 217–218.

48. Gytheion, Archaeological Museum 1: Schröder 1904, pp. 44–46, fig. 6; Mitropoulou 1977, pp. 63–64, fig. 20; Andronikos 1956, pp. 301–302; Hibler 1993, p. 202, fig. 6.

49. An unpublished Boiotian oinochoe in the Louvre reportedly represents an upright snake flanked by two women with hands raised, either in surprise or in adoration: Burr 1933, p. 608.

50. Andronikos 1956, pp. 301–303; followed by Mitropoulou (1977, pp. 63–64), who suggests that this local hero protected the community in war, hence the representation of the dedicator as a warrior.

51. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 558: Tod and Wace 1906, p. 189, no. 558; Mitropoulou 1977, p. 66, fig. 21.

probably dating from the 5th century B.C., depict isolated upright snakes; these seem once again to represent chthonic beings and most likely had a votive function.⁵²

Although the identification of the figures and the interpretation of the scenes depicted on the Lakonian reliefs have long been debated, it is accepted by most scholars today that the reliefs and plaques with seated figures, at least in pre-Hellenistic times, were offerings dedicated to local heroes, Lakonia being an area exceptionally rich in hero shrines.⁵³ Surely the heroic nature of the human figures would have been emphasized by the addition of the snake, an independent superhuman being, in close association with them.⁵⁴ Indeed, the intimate connection between heroes and snakes is reflected in the literary tradition throughout antiquity.⁵⁵

In Lakonia the snake might have been considered a representative of the underworld divinities. Hekataios (*FGrH* 1 F27, *apud* Paus. 3.25.5), referring to Tainaron, the Lakonian promontory where one of the entrances to Hades was located, mentions a snake that was called "the dog of Hades," a hint that in Lakonia there was a snake associated with the underworld, perhaps an earlier or alternative form of Kerberos.⁵⁶

Literary sources are unfortunately silent about the iconographic scheme of the drinking snake.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, some suggestions can be made about its meaning. Since on the earliest Lakonian monuments the snake is not yet associated with the kantharos, it is possible that the drinking-snake scheme in association with human figures was developed during the first half of the 5th century B.C. as another way to stress the close association of the snake with the hero, and by extension the hero's friendly union with the hidden

52. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 5, 355, 6166, 6180, 6360: Mitropoulou 1977, pp. 221–222, nos. 29, 31, 33–35, figs. 138, 140–143; Stibbe 1991, p. 42. See also Dressel and Milchhöfer 1877, pp. 319–320; Tod and Wace 1906, pp. 113, 135, 170, nos. 5, 355; Andronikos 1956, p. 286. Other reliefs with one or two snakes are in the Tegea Museum: Mitropoulou 1977, pp. 222–223, nos. 36–41, figs. 144–146. A similar relief is reported by Le Roy (1982, p. 281, n. 7), built into a tower in the village of Laya in the Mani. It is highly unlikely that these are grave reliefs, as believed by Dressel and Milchhöfer (1877, p. 461): cf. some votive reliefs from Attica with dedicatory inscriptions (Mitropoulou 1977, figs. 114–137; *DarSag* II.1 [1892], p. 409, fig. 2579, s.v. Draco [E. Pottier]) and votive terracotta plaques with relief snakes from Eleusis (Skias 1898, pp. 90–91).

53. See most recently Hibler 1992, pp. 121–122; 1993, p. 199; Salapata 1993. Contra: Andronikos (1956) associates the male figure with Hades; and

Stibbe (1991, 1994) associates the figure on the earliest reliefs with Dionysos. For further bibliography, see Salapata 1993, p. 189.

54. The snake's role in the context of Lakonian ideology remains obscure even though it figures prominently in Lakonian art from the Early Archaic period on. It appears on vase paintings (Stibbe 1972; 1994, pp. 75–85; Pipili 1987), ivory carvings (Marangou 1969), bronze vessels (Stibbe 2000, pp. 147–148), terracotta figurines and plaques (Salapata 1992, 1993, 1997), and stone reliefs, especially those depicting the Dioskouroi (Sanders 1992). Apollodoros (*Bibl.* 2.8.5) mentions that the *drakon* was considered a *semeion* in Lakadaimon.

55. E.g., Plut. *Cleom.* 39; Schol. Ar. *Plut.* 733; Artemidoros 2.13, 4.79. See most recently Barr 1996, pp. 135–137; Salapata 1997, pp. 250–252.

56. Roscher II.1, cols. 1131–1134, s.v. Kerberos (O. Immisch); Küster 1913, pp. 90–91, n. 2. Cf. the snake represented on the entrance to the

underworld, here depicted as a prostyle building, on a late-6th-century black-figure kalpis by the Eucharides Painter (Charlton 1958, pl. IX:a); and also the evidence from Ar. *Ran.* 143 (Küster 1913, p. 108, n. 2). The large snake carved on a rock in the necropolis of Thera could have been a representative of the underworld divinity characterizing the area as a cemetery: Hiller von Gaertringen 1903, pp. 251, 275, pl. III; Dressel and Milchhöfer 1877, p. 461; Rhomaïos 1914, p. 220; Andronikos 1956, pp. 308–309. Although these examples do not come exclusively from Lakonia, the depiction of Kerberos with a snake's tail and a coat of snakes springing from his body on a mid-6th-century Lakonian kylix (Pipili 1987, p. 5, fig. 8) suggests a similar local connection between the beast and snake imagery.

57. The only exception is perhaps a reference to libations poured to snakes from a golden cup: Kratinos fr. 132 Kassel-Austin (124 Kock).

forces of the subterranean world.⁵⁸ At the same time, if the snake was generally seen in Lakonia as a representative of the underworld divinity, then the depiction of snakes partaking of offerings intended for the placation of that divinity would seem to bode well for the community.⁵⁹ As a mortal who now belonged to the underworld, the local hero who provided the snake with drink would have been an appropriate intermediary between the human and divine spheres, especially in times of need.

The second quarter of the 5th century was indeed a troubled time for Sparta. In the 470s and 460s there was unrest within the Peloponnesian League, spearheaded by Arkadia and caused in part by the rising of democratic Athens. This situation was aggravated by the devastating earthquake of 465/4 and the ensuing helot rebellion at Ithome. Finally, in 460 there was an undeclared war, the so-called First Peloponnesian War, between the Athenian and Spartan leagues. Natural disaster and warfare inevitably resulted in a significant loss of life and a decline in the number of citizens.⁶⁰ The “god-fearing” Spartans, notorious for their religiosity, often found religious explanations for their misfortunes. It is possible, then, that the iconographic scheme of a snake drinking from a cup held by a human figure was a development that reflected the need of the local people to appease the divine powers during this period of instability and insecurity.⁶¹

A practice that may be related to the image of the drinking snake is the offering of solid food to snakes.⁶² Honey cakes or fruits were offered to several sacred snakes—Athena’s snake on the Acropolis and the snakes in the cave of Trophonios at Lebadeia and the Asklepieion at Epidauros—and also to Sosipolis, a hero who appeared in snake form.⁶³ The fact that these snakes were not offered the favorite foods of real snakes, such as eggs or mice, reinforces the idea that they were seen not simply as common reptiles but as something else.⁶⁴

The earliest known depictions of the feeding of snakes come once again from Lakonia. In a variation on the drinking scheme, the snakes on another series of terracotta plaques from Ayia Paraskevi at Amyklai, also dated to the late 5th–4th century B.C., are approaching offerings of food (Fig. 10).⁶⁵ In the illustrated example the seated man (with overdeveloped pectorals resembling breasts) holds a kantharos and is accompanied by a

58. Seiffert 1911, pp. 121–122, 124–126. It is possible that the image of two amphoras surrounded by snakes, an emblem of the Dioskouroi, was an expression of the same idea. Kontoleon (1970, pp. 32–33), however, argued against a heroic interpretation of the drinking snake, since the scheme appeared already in Mycenaean and Geometric times.

59. Seiffert 1911, pp. 121–126; Rhomaios 1914, pp. 217–218. We may contrast, for example, the horror of the Athenians before the Persian sack of the Acropolis, when the resident snake left

its honey cake untouched (Hdt. 8.41.2).

60. Cartledge 2002, pp. 171–191; Hodkinson 1989, pp. 102–105; Figueira 2003, p. 224.

61. The Spartans heeded divine signs, respected sanctuaries and traditional festivals, and feared divine punishment more than other Greeks: Parker 1989, esp. pp. 161–163. A similar explanation has been offered by Hodkinson (1999, pp. 166–167) for the establishment of the cult of the Olympic victor Hippodamios.

62. Rhomaios (1914, p. 231) argued unconvincingly that the kantharos on

the Lakonian reliefs contained not drink but offerings of food, like those placed on the *trapeza* next to cult images. On this interpretation the snake, when dipping its head into the vase, would have been eating the same food as the snakes that appear next to the table on some banquet reliefs.

63. Paus. 6.20.2; Schol. Ar. *Nub.* 508.

64. Küster 1913, p. 136; Dentzer 1982, p. 498.

65. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6231/1: Salapata 1992, pp. 961–964, pl. 70:a.



Figure 10. Terracotta plaque from Ayia Paraskevi, Amyklai, late 5th–4th century. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6231/1. Photo G. Salapata

female attendant, who stands in front of him. She holds a small oinochoe in her lowered right hand, while in her raised left hand she carries a tray of offerings, over which a snake is arched. On a 5th-century B.C. stone relief from Petrina, near Sparta, a naked, bearded man stands holding a pick in his left hand and offering a round object (probably a fruit) to an upright snake in front of him. Behind him is a double axe.⁶⁶ From Taras, a colony of Sparta, comes a later stone example, dating probably to the second half of the 4th century.⁶⁷ Depicted here is a nude youth, designated as a warrior by the weapons near him, again offering a fruit to a snake. This relief is most likely funerary, with the youth representing the deceased, here characterized as a hero; it may be one of the earliest depictions of the heroization of a private individual in this scheme.⁶⁸

66. Sparta, Archaeological Museum 6178: Mitropoulou 1977, pp. 52–53, fig. 14; Christou 1962, p. 103. See also the Thiokles relief in Berlin (see below, n. 68).

67. Taranto, National Archaeological Museum I.G. 3920, found west of the necropolis of Taras: Geyer 1989, p. 2, fig. 1; Zancani 1926–1927, fig. 1; Thönges-Stringaris 1965, p. 60, n. 75. Many institutions, including cults and beliefs (Thucydides' *nomima*), must have been passed on from the mother city to her colony, albeit with some modifications.

68. See also the depictions on Roman *lararia*, where one or more snakes approach to eat food deposited on the altar: Boyce 1942. On the other hand, the youth on the Lakonian Thiokles

relief, dating from the end of the 6th century B.C., does not appear to be feeding the snake, as is usually assumed: Berlin, Pergamon Museum 732; Blümel 1963, p. 25, fig. 45; Dressel and Milchhöfer 1877, pp. 314–315, 454–455, pl. 25:b; Häfner 1965, pp. 129–130; Andronikos 1956, pp. 274–276, fig. 7. The youth stands in front of an upright snake, holding in his left hand a spear and in his right a fruit; the snake either holds something long in its mouth or, more likely, is depicted with a crest and beard, but it does not turn its head toward the fruit. The youth holds the fruit in the same way as some of the seated figures: cf., e.g., the Chrysapha relief (Fig. 3) and Sparta Museum 415 (Fig. 4).



Figure 11. Boiotian krater, ca. 400 B.C.
Athens, National Museum 1393.
Kern 1890, pl. 7

THE TIPPLING SERPENT BEYOND LAKONIA

Whatever its exact meaning on the Lakonian monuments, from the 4th century B.C. onward the iconographic scheme of the drinking snake became increasingly popular in other parts of the Greek world as well. One side of a Boiotian krater from about 400 B.C., for example, depicts a male figure reclining on a couch at a banquet, while a large coiling snake drinks from his kantharos (Fig. 11).⁶⁹ On the other side of the krater is a seated female figure holding a scepter and receiving offerings from an attendant. On the basis of the votive limbs hanging in the background, the pair can be identified as Asklepios and his daughter Hygieia, or at least as local healing divinities or heroes.⁷⁰

Indeed, the drinking snake became particularly associated with depictions of Asklepios and Hygieia, and in its abbreviated form, as the “Cup of Health” (showing a snake drinking out of a cup), it has become today an

69. Athens, National Museum 1393: Kern 1890, pl. 7; Lullies 1940, pp. 21–23, pl. 26; Schauenburg 1953, pp. 64–66; Effenberger 1972, pp. 160–161; *LMC* V, 1990, p. 557, no. 7, s.v. Hygieia (F. Croissant).

70. See, e.g., Stafford 1998, p. 177, where the woman is identified as Hygieia. For other suggested interpretations, see Effenberger 1972, p. 160, n. 203.



Figure 12. The “Cup of Health” on a pharmacy bag, Athens. Photo G. Salapata

internationally recognized symbol for a pharmacy (Fig. 12).⁷¹ The snake on its own is of course closely associated with Asklepios, both in cult and in iconography.⁷² Sacred snakes resided in his sanctuary at Epidauros and performed miracle cures, and the 4th-century B.C. chryselephantine cult statue in his temple represented him sitting on a throne, holding a staff in one hand and placing the other above the head of a snake.⁷³ It is likely that Asklepios was originally associated with the snake in his status as a hero, since in his case the boundary between hero and god was fluid and there is evidence for his veneration as both.⁷⁴ On the other hand, the snake is also an appropriate symbol of health and salvation because it is constantly being renewed and rejuvenated by the sloughing off of its old skin.⁷⁵

71. Küster 1913, pp. 136–137. On the iconography of Asklepios, see *LIMC* II, 1984, pp. 868–897, s.v. Asklepios (B. Holtzmann); on Hygieia, see most recently *LIMC* V, 1990, pp. 554–572, s.v. Hygieia (F. Croissant); Stafford 1998; 2000. A gold diadem dated to the late 5th century B.C. depicts a standing man holding a scepter and giving a snake a drink from a phiale; a seated woman, also holding a scepter, is looking back toward him: Arias 1959, pp. 16–18, pl. 12:1–2. Although Arias interpreted the figures as Hades and Persephone, Asklepios and Hygieia should not be excluded. It is interesting to note that representations of Asklepios himself offering the snake a drink

(e.g., *LIMC* II, 1984, nos. 20, 42, s.v. Asklepios [B. Holtzmann]) are rare; it is rather Hygieia who from the 4th century B.C. onward is usually depicted offering a phiale to the snake. The phiale-snake combination, however, was used in general Asklepiian contexts, as, e.g., in the pediment of the late-5th-century propylon of the Athenian Asklepieion, which was decorated with a phiale flanked by two snakes: Riethmüller 1999, p. 128. The iconographic formula of the drinking snake could easily have passed from Asklepios to Hygieia in a Peloponnesian context, since the two had been associated in this region since the 5th century: Stafford 2000, p. 153.

72. The god is usually represented holding a staff with a snake twined around it, or with a snake accompanying him: *LIMC* II, 1984, pp. 865–866, s.v. Asklepios (B. Holtzmann); Küster 1913, pp. 133–137; Schouten 1967, pp. 35–42.

73. Paus. 2.27.2; *LIMC* II, 1984, no. 84 (coin), s.v. Asklepios (B. Holtzmann). Cf. Paus. 2.10.3, where Asklepios enters Sikyon as a snake, and Schol. Ar. *Plut.* 733: “the snake was commonly placed next to the heroes and especially next to Asklepios.”

74. Riethmüller 1999 (with recent bibliography, p. 124, n. 1).

75. Cf. Macrobian *Sat.* 1.20.1–4.

The image of the snake of Asklepios drinking from a cup may well carry a more specific meaning. The depiction on the Boiotian krater appears to hold the key to the significance of the tippling serpent in medical contexts. The association between wine and health was common in Greek literature from the 4th century onward, and a universal toast to health is still popular today.⁷⁶ The medical properties of wine are also suggested by the comic poet Euboulos, who has the god of wine himself explain the etiquette for the host of a symposium: "For sensible men I prepare only three kraters: one for Health (which they drink first), the second for love and pleasure, and the third for sleep."⁷⁷ Athenaios, quoting the 4th-century B.C. medical writer Mnesitheos, says more about the beneficial properties of wine: if taken in moderation, it gives strength to the mind and body, and it is useful in medicine for mixing with drugs.⁷⁸ What more appropriate image, then, with which to decorate the Boiotian krater, a vessel for mixing wine with water, than the images of healing divinities sharing the beneficial properties of wine with the sacred healing snake?⁷⁹

The spread of the iconographic formula of the drinking snake outside Lakonia was not limited to medical contexts. Through an extension of the heroic connotations it had assumed on the Lakonian monuments, it was applied to heroic imagery in general.⁸⁰ Indeed, from the Early Hellenistic period through Roman times the image of a snake drinking out of a cup was a standard feature of stone reliefs and terracotta plaques representing heroes or the heroized dead as riders, banqueters, and warriors.⁸¹ The scheme could even be reduced to an iconographic shorthand, in which the snake drinks from a vase not held by anyone, as on a stone relief from Argos.⁸² In this case the two selected elements, snake and vase, would presumably have been enough to allow viewers to identify the image. Another relief, carved on a rock above the theater at Argos, shows the full version: a rider, armed with shield and spear, and before him a snake rising next to a large krater.⁸³ It is likely that the iconographic formula of a snake with a vessel, placed in front of the rider, indicated his heroic status, whether he was a traditional hero or a recently deceased individual honored as one.

That the image functioned as a heroic emblem is confirmed by another Argive relief, probably dating from the Early Hellenistic period.⁸⁴ The relief, which shows a snake approaching a kantharos, carries a fragmentary

76. Stafford 1998, pp. 162, 171.

77. Eub. fr. 93 Kassel-Austin; Stafford 1998, p. 170.

78. Mnesith. fr. 41 Bertier (*apud* Ath. 2.36a-b).

79. Cf. Stafford 1998, p. 177.

80. The iconographic formula also passed to other scenes where a snake played an important role, as in the story of Herakles in the Garden of the Hesperides: see, e.g., a mid-4th-century Apulian volute krater on which one of the nymphs is feeding a large snake twined around a tree: Sichtermann 1966, p. 50, no. 72, pls. 119-122.

81. Dentzer 1982, pp. 498-499.

For a terracotta plaque from Messene depicting a snake drinking out of a banqueter's phiale, see Themelis 1998, p. 168, fig. 19. For a terracotta plaque from Taras representing a male figure sitting on a couch in front of a stele and holding a phiale out of which an upright, wriggling snake is drinking, see Bartoccini 1936, p. 167, fig. 79; Wuilleumier 1939, pp. 507-508, n. 1; Iacobone 1988, pl. 134:d; Salapata 1997, p. 255 (interpreted there as an offering to a hero). For Hellenistic terracotta plaques from Troy showing

a woman offering a phiale to a snake, see Barr 1996, p. 134, fig. 36.

82. Vollgraff 1951, p. 24, fig. 3.

83. Milchhöfer 1879, pp. 156-157, no. 1; Le Bas and Reinach 1888, p. 96, pl. 101:1 (drawing); Vollgraff 1951, pp. 22-24, fig. 1; Andronikos 1956, pp. 304-305. Cf. Seiffert 1911, p. 126.

84. From Pyrgela, near Argos (now lost): *IG* IV 631; Milchhöfer 1879, p. 158, no. 7; Rhomaïos 1914, pp. 219-220; Vollgraff 1951, pp. 4-10; Andronikos 1956, pp. 303-305.

inscription: "I belong to the hero Lykophron."⁸⁵ Lykophron was a hero of Kythera (*Il.* 15.429–435), an island that, according to Herodotos (1.82), at one time belonged to Argos.⁸⁶ He gave his name to one of the *phratriai* into which the four Argive *phylai* were subdivided around 470–460 B.C.⁸⁷ The standardized iconographic formula of the tippling serpent was thus appropriate for use on Lykophron's relief, evoking his heroic status even though the figure of the hero himself was omitted.⁸⁸

To summarize the above discussion, the iconographic scheme of a snake drinking from a cup, in its full version, in which a human figure holds the cup, was a Lakonian innovation of the first half of the 5th century B.C., and was based on a traditional image of a seated hero holding a drinking vessel in the presence of a snake. It may have developed as a visual expression of the Spartan desire to placate the divine powers and restore good relations with them during a period of major crisis. Following its creation, the drinking-snake scheme was disseminated beyond the geographical borders of Lakonia, where it functioned primarily as a heroic emblem.

85. The alternative translation, "I am the grave monument of Hero, daughter of Lykophron," seems less likely.

86. Vollgraff 1909, pp. 194–195.

87. Piérart 2000, pp. 298–307. The name Lykophronidai appears in *IG* IV 530, line 19, dated to the 5th century B.C.: Vollgraff 1909, p. 184.

88. Vollgraff 1951, p. 5.

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Gina Salapata

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

CLASSICAL STUDIES PROGRAMME

SCHOOL OF HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, AND POLITICS

PALMERSTON NORTH

NEW ZEALAND

G.Salapata@massey.ac.nz