**Mythological Typologies**

"Myths were constantly retold, modified, elaborated, or expanded. Even when the general framework of a myth was well established, intervening episodes could be expanded or even invented. No single form of a myth was considered final, as incidents, characters and events were constantly added or reworked." (Woodford p. 80) Early Greek artists were greatly challenged by the need to portray mythical subjects distinctly, despite restrictions of media and physical space. As the artists refined their craft they developed a system of visual typology. These figural formulas and motifs provided the artist with a shorthand method that quickly addressed many physical restrictions. The artist was then able to focus on depicting the critical, sometimes crucial, details of the myth. Woodford notes that actions are much easier to depict than emotion. By using a formula, the artist assists the viewer in identifying the story, but also attempts to invoke the passion and emotion surrounding the moment he has captured. Motifs may also be utilized to help identify a character or scene. "A formula consists of groups of figures... a motif is a single element...” (Woodford p. 68) The use of both formula and motif may be particularly effective when the viewer has previously experienced an oral recitation of the myth. This complementary relationship of voice and vision gives the mythological subject significantly greater impact than either element would provide independently.

The first formula discussed is vase painters' use of "the amorous pursuit". The examples provided share many common traits. All four are finely detailed red figure pottery, produced between 470 BCE and 450 BCE. Each has a composition of consisting of two figures standing on a shared ground line. The two figures are of similar heights with little deference given to sex or divinity. The pursuer enters from the left and reaches toward the reluctant object of their desire. The pursued figure leans dramatically away and looks back over a shoulder. The scene is bordered with geometric bands which appear to continue around the vase. This banding sometimes touches both the feet and heads of the figures. The grounding band is more substantial and all four examples contain Greek Key symbols intermixed with a unique cross pattern. The background is virtually empty with only stylized floral elements which occasionally serve for visual balance. The similarity of these elements clearly indicate the formula which is being applied. Such formulas developed gradually and were often used by generations of artists. If these conventions are followed, a successful structural composition is often assured. This simple formula can then be used in a great variety of situations. It is not, however, entirely significant in ensuring the aesthetic and emotional success of a scene.

To achieve individual success, to specifically identify the characters and therefore depict the passion of the moment, the artist must employ great skill and significant attention to detail. The red figure technique is well suited to this purpose. It allows fine line detail to be applied, in black slip, by the steady hand of the artist. *Eos pursuing Kephalos*, by the Sabouroff Painter, c. 460-450 BCE (Woodford p.58, Figure 34), is an example of both applied formula and adaptive interpretation. Standing on the left is Eos, winged goddess of the dawn. (Woodford mentions she was particularly susceptible to falling in love with humans.) Her features are finely drawn, as are the delicate lines which separate the feathers of her wings. Her movement and intention can be seen in her striding stance and in the billowing folds of the fabric around her legs. She is reaching emphatically toward the other figure. Details on this second figure ultimately define the scene depicted. It is the hunter, Kephalos, identified here by his short cloak, sun-hat and the spears he carries in his right hand. He is a strapping youth who prudently leans away. He stays just out of the grasp of the Goddess. We know he will not ultimately evade her. It is one subtle benefit of the physical formula, the youth simply has nowhere in the composition to flee. She will catch him. He will succumb and he will most likely suffer for having been caught.

Another use of formula was practiced centuries later by Roman artists in the second century AD. Expensive sarcophagi carved from marble were favored for burial. Artists applied a formula to address physical restrictions inherent in crafting a mythic scene in stone. "Sculptors of Roman sarcophagi had to work much more slowly than vase painters, chipping away bits of stone until they had carved out the images they desired, but formulas with flexibility were just as useful for them." (Woodford p.62) Overall themes varied from simply decorative to biographical, but one frequently used is the association of death and sleep. In examples given on pages 63-67, there are many similarities which help define the formula. These scenes are carved from rectangular slabs, in relief which is often deeply drilled. Figures do not share the same ground line. In most cases the god or goddess approached the sleeping figure while winged love gods flutter nearby. The scene is crowded and there is little negative space left available. In addition to figures, often included are chariots, foliage, animals and even architecture. In this formula the god enters from the left and the object of his affection is on the right. The sleeper reclines with the right arm thrown overhead. Woodford notes that this is a traditional pose used to indicate someone is asleep. Romans also had a slightly more optimistic view regarding the fate of mortals who drew the attentions of a Deity. The formula depicted on sarcophagi imply a happy ending for the sleeper.

Though the formula was set, there was still flexibility to depict various mythological subjects. To expedite completion of the sarcophagus, details of a scene could be carved along with auxiliary figures. An example in the text is, *Dionysus Discovers the Sleeping Ariadne*.c. 200-250 A.D. (Woodford, p. 63, Figure 38) We can see the refined detail that was completed in the artists’ workshop, but Ariadne herself remains with unformed features. "The reason is that this popular type of sarcophagus was often prepared in nearly final form in the workshop to await a customer who would require that the features of Ariadne should be carved into a portrait of his wife." (Woodford p. 63) This mythological scene is part of the narrative surrounding Theseus. The abandoned Ariadne lies sleeping on the right. She is discovered by a standing Dionysus and his attendants. The god is smitten, marries the Minoan princess, and sweeps her into love eternal. The scene was particularly appealing for women, but something entirely different was popular for men. The formula stays essentially the same, but figures are formed to fit a male sleeper and an approaching goddess. In *Selene (Luna) Discovers the Sleeping Endymion*,c. 200-233 AD (Woodford p. 65, Figure 39) though the main figures are sexual opposites of the Ariadne myth, many of the supporting characters and elements follow the formula. Here again are winged love gods, chariots, horses, and foliage. They are compressed into a scene with minimal negative space. With successful application of the formula and distinct alterations in service of his client, the sculptor could adapt mythological subjects to serve his purpose.

"When a new subject had to be depicted, the first thing an artist might do was to look around for some familiar form to guide him." (Woodford p. 73) In the absence of a formula to follow, many artists sought to transfer familiar typology into revolutionary portrayals of myth. In *Hercules and Busiris*, c. 530 BCEE (Woodford p. 74, Figure 47), the artist borrows from a millennia of Egyptian convention to produce a parody of the Pharaoh trampling his enemies. Hercules towers over the smaller Egyptians whom he strangles and holds underfoot. It is a fitting end for Busiris, who had taken to murdering any foreigner who arrived in Egypt. By usurping the Pharoh in his traditional depiction, the artist creates a satirical image with serious undertones. "… the Egyptian held by the ankle, who dangles helplessly upside-down in the air, may not have gotten into that position simply because the hero was inattentive." (Woodford p.74) The insertion of this traditional Greek motif into a traditional Egyptian theme strengthens the context of the mythological scene. By transferring these types the artist finds both an innovative way to glorify the hero and a familiar connection that ensures his message is communicated clearly.