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Observations upon a Greek Vase discovered in Etruria : bearing the name of the fabricator Nicosthenes, in the possession of the Marquess of Northampton

London : Nichols, 1848.

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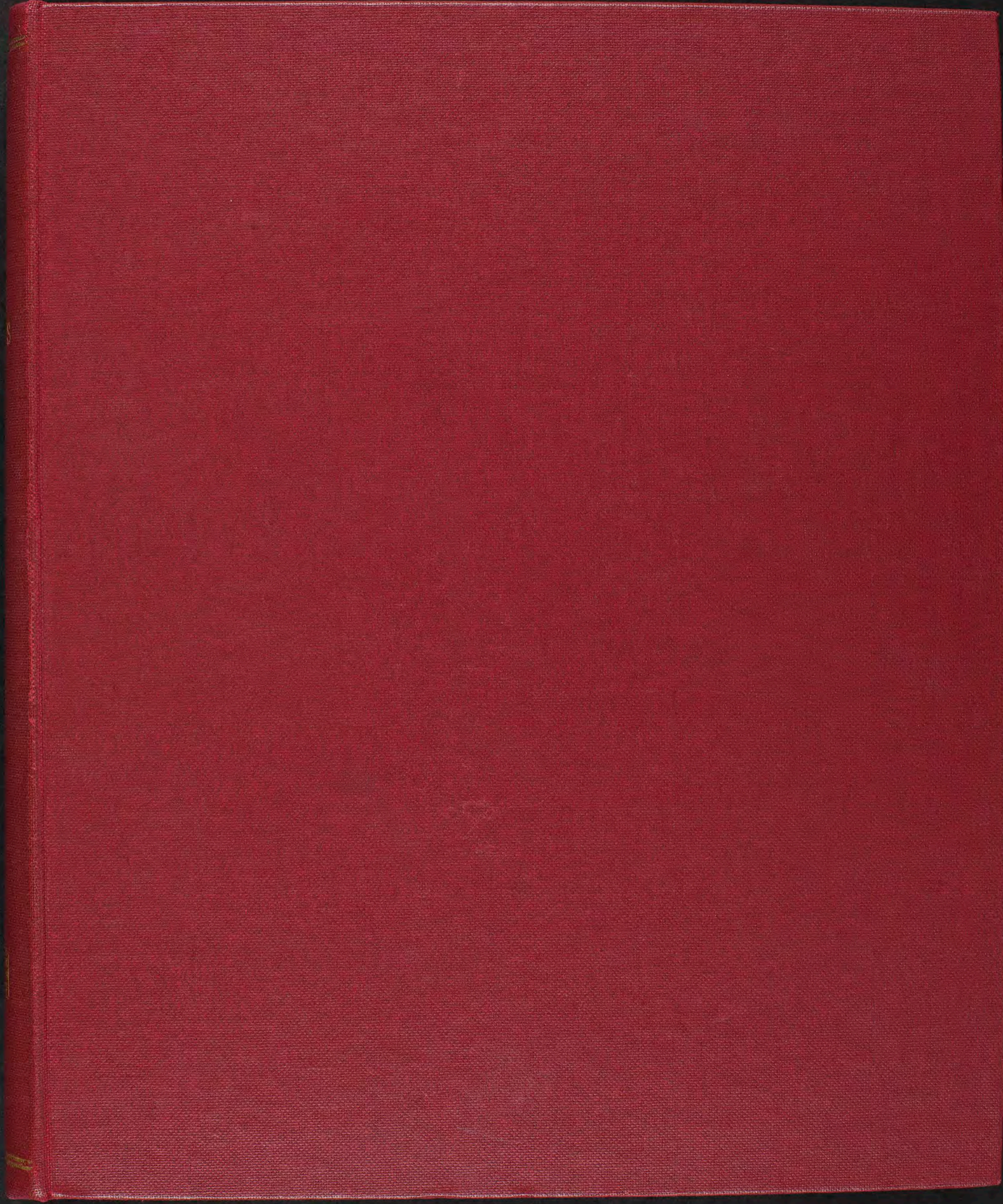
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*Greek Vase discovered in Etruria, in the possession of the Marquess of Northampton.*

*J. Bonomi del.*

*Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1848.*

*J. Basire sc.*

THE SOCIETY FOR  
THE PROMOTION OF  
HELLENIC STUDIES

OBSERVATIONS

UPON A

GREEK VASE DISCOVERED IN ETRURIA,

BEARING THE

NAME OF THE FABRICATOR NICOSTHENES;

IN THE

POSSESSION OF THE MARQUESS OF NORTHAMPTON.

COMMUNICATED TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES,

By THE MARQUESS OF NORTHAMPTON, PRES. R.S., F.S.A.

16 MAR 1906

LONDON:

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1848.

FROM THE  
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VOL. XXXII. pp. 255—262.

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## OBSERVATIONS

UPON A

### GREEK VASE DISCOVERED IN ETRURIA.

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AMONG the various subjects of inquiry suggested by the numerous Greek Vases recently discovered in Etruria, there is one that has been little pursued, although it appears to me to be replete with interest. It is true that the duc de Luynes, in the able description of one vase belonging to himself, has set the example, but it has been but little followed. The inquiry to which I allude is the significance of the various objects depicted on the shields of divinities and heroes, and the degree in which they may serve to identify the personages that bear them.

This question in my opinion may well be considered in connection with the vase, curious itself in many respects, to which I wish to draw the attention of the Society. I must confess that it is chiefly for the more general subject that I have been tempted to bring it forward, though I am aware that the observations that I shall have to make are more calculated to excite than to satisfy inquiry.

The vase of which I am about to treat (Pl. XV. XVI.) belongs to myself, a circumstance that has perhaps mainly contributed to draw my attention to its details.

It is of a peculiar form, with a rather long and narrow neck, and two broad, flat, and very thin handles. Of the same form I possess another vase, of no particular interest in any other respect. In the British Museum there is a third, with a representation of satyrs and nymphs. There are two more in the Vatican;<sup>a</sup> and these are all the coloured vases of this shape that I remember to have seen in the many public and private collections that I have visited. All these vases bear the name of the maker Nicosthenes. I therefore draw the conclusion that he was either the inventor of the shape, or its borrower for painted vases, and that he abandoned it, from its not finding favour in the eyes of the vase-buying public. No later Wedgwood of antiquity seems to have thought it worth his while to revive its use.

As in all these instances, and also on his vases of other and commoner forms, the paintings are black and white on a red ground, we may infer that Nicosthenes was an early manufacturer, and probably with Tleson and Hermogenes among the first who corrected the archaic rudeness of still earlier times.

<sup>a</sup> Mus. Etr. Vat. P. ii. tav. xxvij.

In the three vases in England the handles are adorned with painting, and this was probably the motive for their flatness, but the advantage must have been more than counterbalanced by their increased fragility.

In all of them quivers, or perhaps a conventional sort of flowers, are depicted on their necks. On both of those belonging to me fish are drawn on their lips, while on the lip of the one in the British Museum there are leaves producing nearly the same effect. Having remarked these resemblances, I will now give a more detailed description of the particular subject of this paper.

I have already observed that it is inscribed with the name of its fabricator Nicosthenes, ΝΙΚΟΣΘΕΝΕΣ ΕΠΙΟΙΕΣΕΝ: that on its neck are quivers, fish on its lip, and that its two handles are flat, thin, and broad. On each handle is a man with a spear. It has two historical or heroical subjects. One of these presents to the spectator a duel between two warriors; as does the other also, but with this difference, that in the latter case a dead body lies between them.

In one of these encounters a serpent is seen on the shield of one of the combatants, the inside only of the other shield being visible. In the other duel, one only of the warriors has a cognizance on his shield, and it is a tripod.

Below is a row of animals, two of them being cocks, and they also are fighting. Over these two belligerent birds are inscriptions, one of them a restoration, and the other original.

Now it appears to me that there is very little doubt as to the principal pictures. The great preponderance of subjects from the Trojan war, induces us naturally to turn our first thoughts to the Iliad and Odyssey, and there we find two subjects for each of those represented on the vase. For the three figures we have on other vases the combat between Ajax and Æneas over the slain Patroclus, and that of Achilles and Memnon over Antilochus. For the simple duel we have the death of Hector, and that of Memnon, for the corpse of Antilochus is not always introduced.<sup>a</sup> I do not hesitate to select in the present instance the combat over the body of Antilochus and the death of Hector. My reasons for this preference are, first, that it gives more unity to the vase, by introducing Achilles as a party in each conflict. Secondly, that on the very fine vase of signor Alibrandi at Rome, these two subjects are also to be seen united, with names over the combatants, so that we cannot be mistaken. Lastly, that the existing original inscription over one of the game-cocks is ΑΙΑΚΙΑ,<sup>b</sup> Æacides, the patronymic of Achilles. This I believe to be unique on

<sup>a</sup> As for example in the vase of Alibrandi at Rome.

<sup>b</sup> Written from right to left, thus: ΔΙΚΑΙΑ, or ΑΙΑΚΙΑ, with the kappa turned in the usual manner. The similar irregularity of one letter is seen on an inscription on Mr. Stoddart's beautiful vase of the combat of Theseus and the Amazon. It would be absurd to read the inscription *Dikaia*.





*Subjects represented on the Marquess of Northampton's Vase.*

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any existing vase. It may be worth while to mention, that on a vase in the Royal Collection at Munich, a cock is the emblem on the shield of Hector. On the shield of one of the combatants on my vase is a serpent, and this warrior I believe to be Achilles. The other, whose emblem is a tripod, I conclude to be Memnon.

This leads me to the question of the *Episema*, or emblems on shields. I have remarked already, that little attention has been paid to it by archaeologists; owing partly perhaps to its complication and difficulty, and partly to an opinion expressed by Millingen, and probably shared by others, that these signs are frequently entirely arbitrary. That they are so sometimes I myself believe. Probably they may sometimes, like the continual representation of rings and balls, be placed on the shields of warriors from the ease with which they can be drawn. Sometimes possibly the artist was fond of drawing particular animals, or believed that they were especially calculated to exhibit his skill, or to add grace and beauty to his design. Certainly, I do not at all entertain or advocate the idea that any particular emblems were exclusively attached to any particular heroes or families; at the same time I am convinced that they are very often selected as being in some way either appropriate to the personage portrayed, or indicative of the particular divinity under whose protection circumstances had placed him. Sometimes also, as has been shewn by the duc de Luynes, they are chosen as pointing out the territory belonging to a chieftain; and for a similar identification, ancient coins may be extremely useful.

The serpent, for instance, I find continually on the bucklers of giants, on the oft-recurring subject of the *Gigantomachia*.

I find it not uncommon among the many *episema* of Minerva; and I find it also very often on shields of Achilles, and perhaps of other Grecian heroes.

I believe it to belong to the giants, on account of their being earth-sprung; but why should it be given to Minerva? M. Panofka attributes this to the fable of *Erichthonius*. I think it not impossible that its object may be to make the whole armour of the goddess more connected and consistent, and that the artist conceived that, as she bears a serpent-fringed garment, and a serpent-tressed head of Medusa on her breast, she should also bear a serpent on her shield. It is, I apprehend, but an accidental coincidence that the wisdom of the serpent should be an Oriental metaphor, but it is not absolutely impossible that it might be known to Western civilization, and, if so, it would be an additional reason why the serpent should typify the goddess of wisdom.

Be this, however, as it may, she frequently does bear this emblem; and, as she is represented by Homer as a favourer of the Greek cause, and both by him and by vase-artists as the especial protector of Achilles, I conclude that it is in reference to

her that he very often has the serpent on his shield. For instance, in Mr. Rogers's remarkable vase, on which the son of Thetis, with his name inscribed, is seen in his tent immersed in grief, his shield is suspended with a serpent for its bearing.

In the case of another equally remarkable monument of Grecian art, also the property of Mr. Rogers, where Achilles is seen in the act of putting Troilus to death, his attendant carries his shield, on which is a serpent.

On a vase in the British Museum a winged female, no doubt Iris, brings his arms to Achilles, and here again appears a serpent emblem; as is the case also on another vase in our national collection, where Thetis on a sea-horse carries his arms to her son.

On an amphora, one of the finest in the same Museum, is depicted a warrior arming for battle, with a female figure, either of Thetis or Iris, holding a buckler, on which is a head of a lion or tiger between two serpents.

Mr. Millingen, in his "*Peintures antiques et inedites des Vases Grecs*," gives a plate of a vase of which the main subject is the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. One of the minor designs exhibits a combat. Mr. Millingen doubts whether this be a real battle, a fight of gladiators, or a theatrical representation.

For myself I can see no reason for these doubts. The principal subject would naturally lead us to expect that Achilles, the fruit of the union of Peleus and Thetis, should be the protagonist of the fight, and the details seem to corroborate this opinion. They are very singular. Five warriors are present, two of them with Phrygian caps, and therefore probably Trojans. Two more are bare-headed, while only one has a Grecian helmet. From this distinction, I conclude that Achilles, the son of Peleus, and most renowned of the Grecian heroes, stands before us. The two unhelmeted men are intended, as I presume, for his followers. One of them bears a star, one of the commonest of emblems, on his shield, while his leader has the cognizance of a serpent.

In the fine private collection of Mr. Hope are two vases that appear to have been intended for a pair, and are, I think, peculiarly interesting with reference to the subject of the present paper.

On one of them is depicted a warrior going to the fight, and bearing on his shield a tripod. On the other side of the vase we see the same warrior, bearing also the tripod on his buckler, killing an enemy, who is probably Patroclus.

On one side of the companion vase is also a single hero, while on the reverse is a warrior, probably the same individual, arming himself, while on his shield is a serpent. These two vases seem to give us the latter half of the *Iliad*: the first representing Hector going forth, and killing Patroclus; and the second Achilles, roused again to don his armour, and actually on his way to wreak his vengeance

on the Trojan hero. I ought to state that a winged female, probably Iris, brings his arms to Achilles, as in the case that I have mentioned from the British Museum.

In the Catalogue of M. Durand<sup>c</sup> is described a vase, on which is the combat of Achilles and Memnon over the body of Antilochus. The buckler of Achilles has a serpent, while the son of Nestor has two on his shield; shewing apparently that serpents were for some reason the especial emblem of the Grecian cause.

M. Raoul de Rochette, in his "Monumenti inediti," gives an engraving from a vase of two serpents on the shield of Ajax, who is carrying the body of Achilles. This may possibly be intended for the shield of Achilles himself.

On the very remarkable vase of Echsechias, in the collection of the Vatican, engraved in the "Monumenti inediti," where Achilles and Ajax are throwing dice, the shield of the former has upon it a serpent, a satyr's head, and a tiger, while the buckler of Ajax displays two serpents and a Gorgonium. It is to be observed here, also, that both warriors belong to the party favoured by Minerva.

A vase, published by the duc de Luynes, exhibits four warriors with a female, believed by its learned illustrator to be intended for Chryseis. A shield bears the emblem of a serpent. May not the subject be supposed to be the capture of Briseis by Achilles? One of the other warriors has an eagle for his cognizance, and may perhaps be Idomeneus, who has the cognate emblem of the thunderbolt on the vase of Cynus, so well explained by the duke.

A vase published by M. Raoul Rochette,<sup>d</sup> exhibits to us Cassandra seized by Ajax Oileus, who has a serpent on his shield; shewing another instance where it is the episemon of a Grecian hero.

I have probably said enough on the serpent as appropriate to Achilles, and I may now be asked why the tripod should be borne by Hector and Memnon. I believe the reason to be that the tripod is the natural emblem of Apollo, one of the divine protectors of the Trojans, as Pallas was of the Greeks. M. Gerhard, in his description<sup>e</sup> of a vase at Berlin, suggests this very explanation. That this was a real motive for a device on a shield we learn from a passage quoted by the scholiast of Pindar from Bacchylides. I am indebted for this corroboration of my opinion to Mr. Birch, who has given me other important assistance in drawing up this paper.

I have already pointed out some cases in which the tripod appears as a Trojan badge, but I think it expedient to adduce some further instances.

A cylix, or tazza, belonging to myself, has two warriors fighting over a third. I believe either the usual combat of Achilles and Memnon over Antilochus, or Ajax rushing to the rescue of Patroclus from Hector. In this case Memnon or Hector

<sup>c</sup> Page 112, No. 321.

<sup>d</sup> Page 60.

<sup>e</sup> Berlins Antike Bildwerke, S. 290. No. 1004.

has a tripod, and Achilles or Ajax a bull's head; an episemon borne by them elsewhere.<sup>f</sup>

On an amphora<sup>g</sup> engraved by Gerhard are two combats, apparently of Greeks and Trojans. In *each* case there is one shield with a tripod and one with a bull's-head, as if they were the recognised symbols of the two parties.

On a vase figured by the duc de Luynes, the same subject occurs, and Memnon has again a tripod.

On a large vase belonging to Mr. Blayds is the same subject, and in this case also a tripod is seen on the shield of Memnon. On the reverse, is a hero in his chariot, probably the triumphant Achilles, with two fish on his shield.

One of Mr. Hertz's vases gives us a similar example of the tripod on the shield of Memnon, who is fighting with Achilles over the body of Antilochus, with Thetis and Aurora standing near to see the conflict between their sons, as in the Alibrandi vase already mentioned.

In the British Museum is a vase<sup>h</sup> with a bull's head on one hero's shield, and a tripod on that of the other, who is wounded. This probably portrays the duel between Achilles and Hector, the former bearing the same emblem of strength and courage as in my cylix already described.

Our national collection possesses another vase, where we see on one side Hector, Andromache, Astyanax, and Priam, or, as it is interpreted in the Durand Catalogue, Paris, Helen, Troilus, and Priam. The shield of the Trojan hero, be he Hector or Paris, does not indeed bear a tripod, but instead of it a white globe, which may typify the sun, and equally indicate the favour of Apollo, though Homer does not appear to consider the two as the same.

Millin, in his "Peintures des Vases antiques," gives an engraving of a very interesting picture of the combat of Achilles and Memnon. The shield of Achilles bears a head of Medusa, doubtless allusive to the breast-plate of Minerva. On the buckler of Memnon is a star, which Millin refers to the sun, of which Aurora, the mother of Memnon, is the herald. Is it not more likely that it is the morning star, "day's harbinger?" Millin quotes Homer to prove that Agamemnon bore the gorgonium on his shield; and says that other authors shew that it was not con-

<sup>f</sup> See Gerhard, *Auserlesene Vasenbilder*, No. 201. See also a vase in the British Museum, No. 440, described in the Durand Catalogue No. 814, on which on one side is a warrior arming, with a bull's head on his shield, and an old man, while on the opposite side two warriors facing and conversing, one with a tripod, and one again with a bull's head,—probably Hector and Ajax. See *Iliad*, book vii. On the reverse of the vase, 201 of Gerhard, is a hero with a cock on his shield, which we are informed by Pausanias was borne by Idomeneus as descended from the sun. In the same manner the scholiast on the *Phoenissæ* of Euripides states, that heroes bore emblems allusive to their families. <sup>g</sup> *Auserlesene Vasenbilder*, No. 213. <sup>h</sup> No. 651.

fined to that of Minerva. Was not the circumstance that it was one of the cognizances of Pallas Athene the very reason why it was borne by Agamemnon, Achilles, and other Grecian chieftains?

Millingen, in his account of the Coghill vases, has published an engraving of a vase on which is a youthful hero, apparently proceeding on a military expedition. There are besides two other men, not in armour, and a female. On the shield of the warrior is an emblem, which is described as a star, but, as its rays are wavy, I apprehend that it rather represents a cuttle-fish, which on another vase appears as the badge of Pelides. This probably alludes to Thetis, as a sea-nymph. The interpretation that I should put on this design is, that it portrays Achilles leaving the court of Lycomedes to go to Troy. A bearded figure with a staff is probably Ulysses, and the female Deidamia.

In the Durand Catalogue is a vase<sup>i</sup> on which the same subject is apparently represented, and here also on the buckler of Achilles is a cuttle-fish. This is one of the vases on which Minerva has a shield with a tripod in the presence of Hercules.

On a cylix published by the Prince of Canino, inscribed with the names of the heroes, Achilles bears the emblem of a cuttle-fish, Æneas of a lion, and Antilochus of a boar.

It would be unfair to my subject, were I to deny that it is attended with some difficulties and anomalies. I will mention some, and see how far we can reasonably account for them.

In two vases<sup>k</sup> described in the Catalogue de Durand, Minerva bears on her shield a tripod. The same circumstance occurs also on one in the Gregorian Museum, on two in the possession of Mr. Hertz, and on an amphora<sup>l</sup> in the Pizzati Collection, published by M. Gerhard. In all these six cases, however, Hercules is present, and the emblem on the shield of his celestial protector may allude to his contest with Apollo for the tripod, a frequent subject on Grecian pottery. In the same catalogue an amphora is described,<sup>m</sup> in which the tripod occurs on the shield of Hercules himself.

On an amphora in the British Museum<sup>n</sup> is a beautiful representation of the parting of Hector and Andromache, and on Hector's shield we find the serpent, the emblem of his great rival. Is it possible that the artist has had an inaccurate recollection of the order of events, and has forgotten that the final separation of Hector from Andromache preceded his victory over Patroclus? Were this the case, he might have intended to have represented the Trojan to have gone forth in the armour he had taken from his victim.

<sup>i</sup> Page 91, No. 276.

<sup>k</sup> Page 92, No. 277; page 95, No. 290.

<sup>l</sup> Auserlesene Vasenbilder, No. 135.

<sup>m</sup> Page 111, No. 319.

<sup>n</sup> No. 810.

On another vase in the same museum,<sup>o</sup> Achilles drags the body of Hector, and the shield in his chariot has a tripod upon it. Here also the artist, from the desire to be very correct, seems to have fallen into a similar error. He has probably intended to represent the son of Thetis as carrying in his chariot the buckler of his heroic victim; forgetting all the while that he had in fact recovered from the son of Priam the shield that had before been his own, and which had been taken from Patroclus.

I might mention also a serpent on the shields of Memnon and Æneas, a bull's head on that of Memnon, and a tripod on that of Achilles; for which I cannot account, except by supposing them to have been owing to the caprice or convenience of the artists, and that they were adopted as being easy or picturesque.

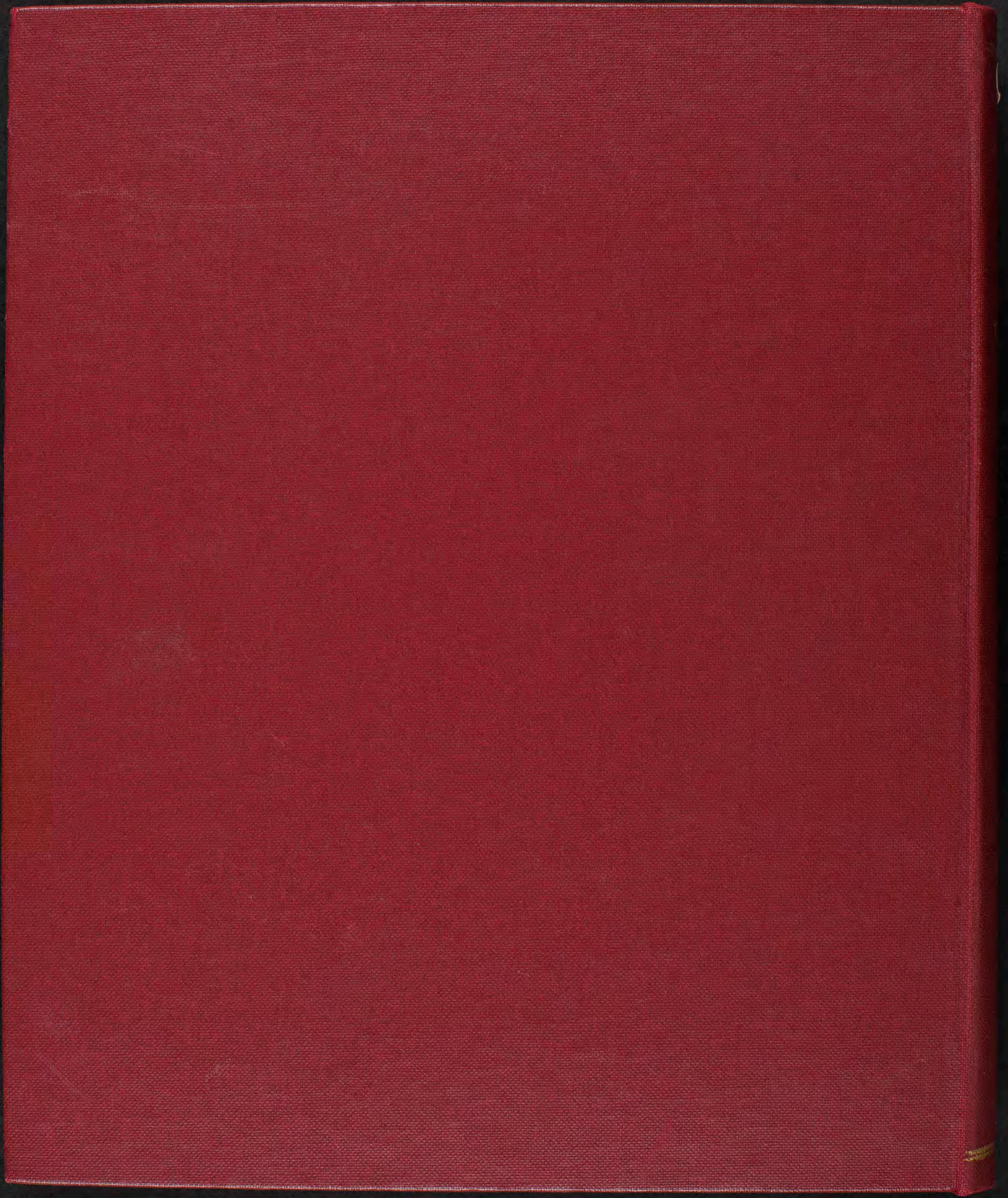
I think that I have succeeded in shewing that the especial emblems of the son of Peleus are the serpent, gorgonium, bull's head, and marine animals, alluding to Minerva, to his own personal qualities, and to his mother Thetis: that the emblems of Memnon and Hector were the tripod of Apollo, and, in one instance, that the globe of the sun was used by the son of Aurora. To these I might add, that the dove of his mother Venus appears on the shield of Æneas; the cock, as a combative animal, on that of Hector; the lion on that of Menelaus; and on one vase a crescent and a globe on the shields of two Amazons, alluding probably to Diana and her brother Apollo. These emblems seem to be partly suggested by the heroic and personal qualities of the respective warriors; but more often to be indicative of the particular divinities under whose especial protection they placed themselves, or were placed by circumstances. If then this be the case, if appropriateness was often studied, then by a converse method of reasoning we may hope to assist in decyphering subjects that are not sufficiently distinguished by other details.

If I have succeeded in shewing this in some instances, and if I shall induce others more able than myself to follow up the inquiry, I shall not think my own labour in drawing up this paper, nor the patience of my readers, entirely thrown away.<sup>p</sup>

<sup>o</sup> No. 533.

<sup>p</sup> Since the passage in p. 259 was read before the Society of Antiquaries, I have had the opportunity, by the kindness of Mr. Hope, of seeing again the two vases, and I am sorry to find that there is an error in the description of one of them, which I had described from an inaccurate note. On the reverse of the arming of Achilles is not a warrior in armour, but a young man with a staff; and I conclude therefore that this either represents Achilles walking before his tent, and *unarmed* in consequence of the stripping of Patroclus, or more probably a messenger with the news of his friend's death. Either of these explanations would accord with the Iliac connexion of the two vases.





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