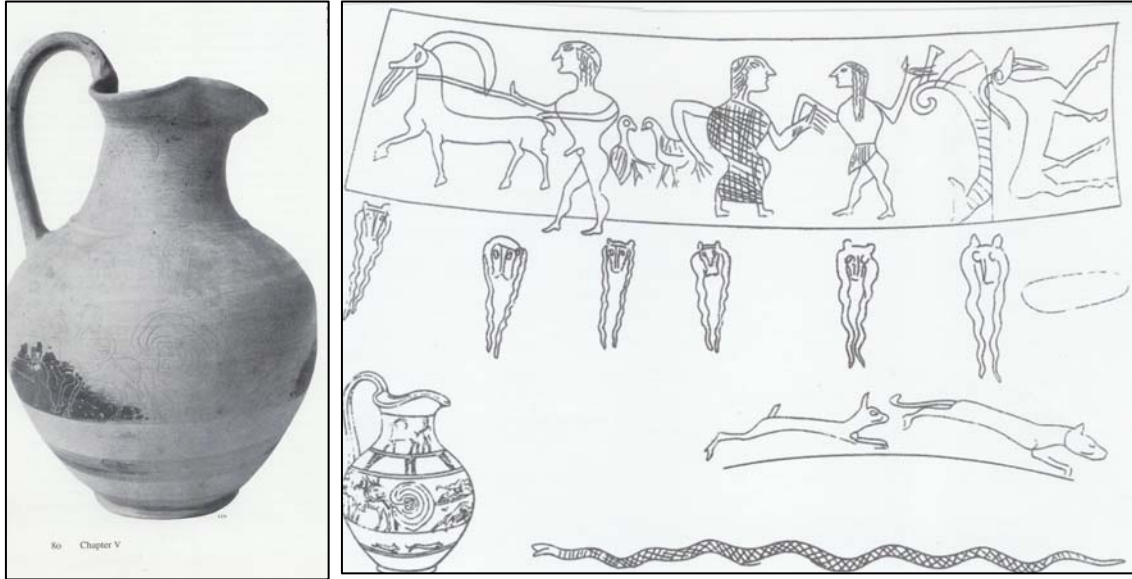


Epilogue to *Sleep Under Stone*: “How it Goes On”



On the belly of the old wine pitcher, a pattern once was scratched into the surface of the clay. Seven circles enfold a central cross. And all around a procession of youths: painted dancers with spears, painted warriors bearing shields and swords. Beardless youths on horseback. Here a woman offers a gift to a man. A child stands between them, a girl whose shoulder the man rests his hand upon. And behind the seven circles, a man and a woman lie together in an embrace. Here they are smiling their pleasure, here angry and afraid. This is either the end or the beginning.

A vase can tell a story as a man plows a field. Time moves in two directions. The wine pitcher is six hundred years old, or two thousand six hundred, and from the images time has worn the paint away. A serpent ripples along the lower band where the pitcher tapers toward its base. Just above, a leopard chases a lion. Below the lip, a man tends a goat. Two birds. A man leads a woman by the hand toward his waiting ship. But this may be another story.

The hands that hold this wine pitcher are a woman's hands. She is so young that being a woman is a country she has only just stepped into. She stands at the entrance to a shrine below the walls of a town far from her home. Behind her will come more women, virgins all, like her, and like her wearing thin, white gowns and short-cropped hair. No sandals or coverings for their feet. The story on the old wine pitcher passes into her keeping outside the west walls of a town called *Novum Ilium*, which Roman settlers have built atop the ruins of Troy at the mouth of the Dardanelles.

For eight hundred years the daughters of Lokris have come to pay tribute to a memory. No one speaks of the mystery these women serve, but every seven years when the Great Year begins and ends, the priestesses of the shrine greet the young girls just come from their home across the sea, young girls who will take their place at the shrine of Athena, carrying in silence a story that cannot be told.

A hundred years before the vase was made, there was a poet who had heard the story. No one knows how. He was blind and could not see the pictures. But he made the story out of words, out of the sad memories of all the men and all the ships that brought them to the shores where they fought and died. The battles he made out of words in his poem were told again and again for two thousand years, and between the battles that poured from his words like wine, he hid the circles and the dancers: the story the daughters of Lokris have sailed over the Aegean to remember. The story that could not be told

The Romans on the hill above the shrine came to this land over the same wide Aegean, and farther still, across the Adriatic. They say this is their home, and to make it true, they tell a story about the Trojan prince who sailed over the sea to Rome. They play a game on horseback, seven times round and round a cross, planted in the dirt. Truia, they call it. No one knows why, except to say this hero's home is their home. The Romans don't visit the shrine of the daughters of Lokris. They have built a vast temple to their Athena, the one they call Minerva, goddess of wisdom and of war, gleaming marble and bright-painted. It crowns the summit of their walled town. The Lokrian Maidens in their simple white shifts and oddly cropped hair never visit this fine temple. Indeed, they do not set their bare feet outside the shrine at all, or if they do, they must run faster than the

men who, if they catch them, may kill them for their pleasure. No one knows the story why.

But in their simple shrine outside the west wall, the Lokrian Maidens honor the goddess by her old name –Tritogenia. Daughter of the sea. She who sprang from the earth, her mother, like a river, like a fountain. Outside the walls of the shrine, the only living spring still flows from the underground channels, a spring once sacred to Poseidon, Lord of the Sea, Oceanos, whom the daughters of Lokris call Time-Without-Age.

For eight hundred years they have come, these women of the *mystikos*. “To pay tribute,” is all they say, all they have ever replied to the questions the men have posed, Lydians, Aeolians, Dorians, Persians, Macedonians. Tribute for the priestess who lived here long ago. Tribute for the goddess who was defiled. “Which priestess?” the men ask, “What goddess?” But the maidens of Lokris press their fingers to their lips in the sign of the sacred mysteries.

The old woman who has served stands now at the entrance in her white gown and short-cropped hair to greet the new maiden as the Great Year turns. Into the hands of this girl, she places the ancient painted *oenochoe*, the terracotta wine

pitcher, to pour the first libation, first greeting. To pass to her the story that cannot be told.

It is always the end and the beginning, the Great Year closing and opening, the daughters of Lokris leaving and arriving. For eight hundred years they have come. For two thousand more, the men who live on the hill will arrive and disappear, until at last the old fortress is abandoned to the unstoppable north wind, the silting of bays, the unseen ophionic shifts of continents below the sea, the slow decay of time.

And the story on the pitcher, the seven circles enfolding the tree of life, the cross of death, the axis of heaven, man and woman locked in their pleasure and their pain, this is the *mystikos* they honor in silence. In silence and faded pictures, in lines etched in clay. And this is how the story that could not be told goes on.

