

*The Greek Style Mural in the Peggy Glanville-Hicks Composers' House*

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Peggy Glanville-Hicks painted a Greek style mural on the northern wall of the courtyard at the rear of her house in 45 Ormond Street, Paddington. It was painted soon after she began living in the house in 1976, after her return from Australia in 1975. The mural is almost autobiographical in its nature, since features of the mural allude to her professional career and operatic compositions. Elements are also included from her travels in Italy, where the museums display the actual Greek vases, which she very likely used as models, and where murals in Etruscan tombs were also possible inspirations.



The part of the wall of the courtyard, where the mural is painted, was originally directly adjoining to the house itself. In 2013, the part of the courtyard directly behind the house was enclosed, so that the mural is now in the rear room of the Composers' House, which overlooks the courtyard.

The mural has the dimensions, as preserved, of height of approximately 2.38 m for most of its length, and length 4.64 m. It is painted using the colours white, brown, purple, green and yellow, in a single layer using household paints or artists' acrylics over a thin green undercoat. The left, western, side extends for 2.92 m, over half its horizontal length, ending in a vertical division, and the mural is painted on a thin coat of render, originally applied over the brick wall. The mural is painted over the face of the vertical division, which is inset for 0.11m. At the vertical division, the render ends, and the mural continues on the right, eastern,

side of the division for 1.72 m, and is painted directly onto the wall, with the courses of bricks visible.

The reason for the use of render on the western side of the wall and its absence on the eastern side is probably simply because the mural was painted by Glanville-Hicks on the existing surface of the wall. Prior to Glanville-Hicks moving into the house, the western side was probably rendered because it was closer to the house, and, being visible from within, was required to have a smooth finish, whereas the eastern side of the wall was either built later and thus not rendered for whatever reason, or not finished with render because it was further away from the house, and thus less visible, and, therefore, not needing a rendered finish.

Before the enclosure of this part of the courtyard, the ground of the courtyard was paved with bricks up to the base of the mural. The floor has now been lowered, and below the mural is a wooden skirting board above a wooden floor. There are three small metal elements either attached to or protruding from the mural.

The mural is generally in good condition, although, as a result of being in the open from the time when it was painted until 2013, it has an overall dirty appearance, some cracking and flaking of paint, and a light moss cover up to 1.0 m from its base.

The principal decoration of the mural is a frieze of two chariot riders moving to the right. The three horses, on the left, are white in the front, brown in the middle and white at the rear, and, the two on the right are brown in the front and yellow at the rear. The riders, from left to right, are male and female.

The charioteer on the right is very similar to one depicted on the famous Corinthian vase, called an *olpe*, known as the Chigi Vase, by the Chigi Painter, dated c.650-640 BC (Rome, Villa Giulia, 22679), which was found in an Etruscan tomb in Formello, near Veii, just north of Rome. It copies the figure on the central frieze on the body of the vase, which depicts a lion hunt. This is most likely to be the actual model copied by Glanville-Hicks. We can compare the details of the chariot, which are similar, such as the shape of the handles, and the shape of the body of the chariot, which is painted in dark paint with an upper border painted white with dark dots. In both cases, the following features are similar: the wheel is represented in white paint with details shown in dark outline, the spokes of the wheel are joined to the round section of the wheel with rounded supports, and angle of the spokes of the wheel, the top element being, as it is, 20 degrees to the right of vertical, is exactly the same on the vase and the mural. The slope of the bar, which harnesses the chariot to the horses, and the step at the back of the chariot which projects beyond the wheel, ending in a flaring projection, are similar on both.

The charioteer is similar on both the vase and the mural, and the details of the hair, facial features, such as the almond shaped eye, and dress, resemble each other, although the figure on the mural has a different colour scheme to that on the vase. The figure is portrayed in the characteristic style of Greek art of the Archaic Period (700-480).

There is however one major difference. The charioteer on the vase has a flat upper chest below the arm, and is thus a male figure, whereas the copy on the mural has a protruding upper torso resembling a woman's breast. The treatment of the facial features and hair on the figure on the mural also give the appearance of a female rather than a male figure. The portrayal of a female charioteer in Archaic Greek art would be very unusual.

The portrayal of a woman, particularly as the central figure of the scene, in action and in a traditionally masculine role, could be interpreted as a particular characteristic feature included by Glanville-Hicks, who had women, who were known for their public actions, as central characters of her operas, such as in *Nausicaa* (1960) and the Greek poet Sappho in *Sappho* (1963). Indeed, the figure could allude to Glanville-Hicks, who pursued her career in a male dominated musical world of the period. It could even be suggested that she has changed a man in the original painting into a woman in the mural, in order to convey her view about herself, as a woman, entering a masculine professional world. She was taking on the role of a man, as it might have been perceived both by society and herself during her lifetime.

The vase has a four-horse chariot, whereas the mural has a two-horse chariot. The use of varied colours of the horses and the treatment of the tails and hindquarters are similar on both the vase and the mural. However, the horses on the vase are walking, whereas those on the mural are galloping, so that the foreparts of the horses on the vase are not the model for those on the mural. The horses on the mural have collars to which the reins are attached, and the collar on the brown horse is composed of white squares with dark dots, and, on the yellow horse, of brown dots.

The horses drawing the chariot on the left are similar to those in the scene with the chariot on the Corinthian red-ground vase, called a *krater* (Vatican 16448) in the Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, The Vatican, by the Cavalcade Painter, dated *c.*570-550, from Caere (modern Cerveteri) in Etruria (approximately modern Tuscany). On the vase, as on the mural, the horse at the front is white, whereas the one behind is dark in colour, purple on the vase, and brown on the mural, and the rear horses are in both cases represented with their heads raised above the front ones. The manes of the horses are similar, composed of thick bunches of hair with pointed ends. The position of the legs of the front white horse is similar on both scenes, as is the relationship between the legs of the white horse at the front and the dark horse behind. However, the scene on the vase depicts a four-horse chariot, whereas the one on the mural is a three-horse chariot.

The upright male charioteer, looking backwards, is in a similar pose to the charioteer on the upper frieze of the wine mixing bowl, called a *dinos*, and stand by the Gorgon Painter (Paris E874), to the right of the two warriors in combat. However, he has a profile eye, facial features and beard, of a style which is more usually found in Greek vase painting of the Classical Period (480-323).

This chariot has a five-spoked wheel, with lugs visible on the axle. A five-spoked wheel is unusual for representations on vase painting of the period of the models used for the mural.

These chariots usually have a four-spoked wheel, similar to the one which is represented on the chariot on the right. The chariot on the vase by the Cavalcade Painter, noted above, drawn by the horses which are similar to the model of the chariot on the left, has a four-spoked wheel. The five-spoked wheel on the chariot could thus be Glanville-Hicks' own interpretation.

The representation of the two wheels of both the chariots seen from the side, being, as it is, only one wheel, and not two, is typical of the Archaic vase painting, which Glanville-Hicks used as models, such as on the vases which have just been discussed.

The border of the mural along the top and on the right is a wave pattern in purple. Just before the vertical division, one of the waves is treated as a small curl. This decorative motif of a wave pattern is not apparent on well-known Greek vases of the Archaic and Classical periods. The decoration is, of course, quite a simple one to conceive, and it could well be Glanville-Hicks' own idea.

The chariot frieze is placed on a purple ground line. Below is a frieze of a single maeander pattern, composed of thirteen individual spirals, above and below which are areas of white paint. Whereas a maeander pattern is composed of a continuous line, a single maeander pattern is made up of individual spirals, which have two ends. Beneath the single maeander pattern, there is a purple line at the base of the mural near the floor. The spirals of the single maeander pattern are represented indiscriminately, turning in a clockwise and an anticlockwise direction. Furthermore, they indiscriminately commence on each of their four sides.

The single maeander is a characteristic decoration in Greek vase painting in the Archaic and Classical Periods. Several varieties exist, but this form is found on a well-known Athenian red figure cup of the vase painter Douris, dated c.480-470 (Vatican), from Caere (modern Cerveteri). It is a stylistic feature of this particular vase painter, who was active at the end of the Archaic and the beginning of the Classical Period. The number of spirals of each single maeander in the mural, that is, three, as well as the concept of a single maeander pattern with spirals in different directions, corresponds to the vase in the Vatican, which suggests that it could be the possible model.

Above and below the chariots in the field are a bird, two palmettes, each with a base of a volute, and a rosette. The bird has roughly the same composition and flies in the same direction as one on the Corinthian red-ground vase from Caere, noted above. Rosettes of a slightly different form are also found on this vase. Palmettes, with a volute at their base, either curling or simple, like those on the mural, are frequent decoration on vases of the late Archaic Period, such as on Athenian black figure vases, dated to the late sixth and early fifth centuries. These decorative elements have the role of filling ornaments in the field between the main figures in the mural. This is characteristic of Greek, especially Corinthian, vase painting of the sixth century, and the arrangement in the field is similar to that on the *krater* by Cavalcade Painter, noted above.

The figures drawn in different dark colours and with the use of outline, against a cream or white background, are generally similar to the style of Corinthian vase painting of the sixth century, of which two examples were probably used as sources for the mural.

The mural has the overall appearance of what a large scale Greek painting was like, which was executed on wooden boards attached to walls and on stone or plaster. Very little remains of examples of painting, using these media, from the Archaic and the Classical Periods. Our knowledge of Greek painting is derived largely from its imitation in vase painting. As I have shown, it is from vase painting that Glanville-Hicks derived the elements which are used in the mural, and the mural is not a direct copy of one particular Greek vase painting, but incorporates elements from several vase paintings, which are, indeed, of different dates.

It is possible that Glanville-Hicks was also influenced by Etruscan tomb paintings, which themselves, being murals, are similar in overall conception to the mural which she painted, particularly in their use of various colours. A few examples with chariots are known, such as the Tomb of the Bigas at Monterozzi, near Tarquinia, Etruria, and the Tomb of the Olympic Games, at Tarquinia. In 1954, she travelled through Tuscany and is very likely to have visited painted Etruscan tombs, given her interest in the Etruscans. Indeed, her *Etruscan Concerto* (1954), has quotations from D. H. Lawrence's *Etruscan Places* (1932), which refer to Etruscans dancing in scenes in the tombs of Tarquinia.

Since the three vases, two Corinthian and one Athenian, which were used either as the model for part of the mural or is very similar to the model, are very famous vases in museums in Rome and the Vatican, it is probable that Glanville-Hicks saw them and became interested in them during her visit to Rome. In 1954, she visited the National Etruscan Museum (Villa Giulia) in Rome (Murdoch, p. 113, who refers to the 'Etruscan Museum', which is probably the Villa Giulia), which was a direct inspiration for her *Etruscan Concerto*. The Chigi Vase, which is used as a model for part of the mural, is a very famous exhibit in this museum, which she undoubtedly saw at the time of her visit. While in Rome, she could easily have visited the Museo Gregoriano Etrusco in the Vatican, where the Corinthian *krater*, which is of a type of vase which is very similar to the model for part of the mural, is a significant piece. These features of the mural, copied from finds from ancient Etruria, are thus a reference to one of her famous musical pieces. She could also have visited the section of the Vatican Museum, where the cup by Douris, with the single maeander pattern, is likely to have been on display.

The mural largely has the overall style of Greek vase painting of the mid seventh to mid sixth centuries, because of the style of Corinthian vase painting, which it largely recalls. This date range is roughly contemporary to the life of the Greek poet Sappho, who was active on the island of Lesbos in the northern Aegean Sea in *c.*600. Sappho was, of course, centrally important in Glanville-Hicks' work, since she provided the title and inspired the theme of her opera *Sappho*.

The inclusion of pieces of original art works from various artistic sources, dating both from the time of the dramatic date of the composition and later dates, and their adaptation in order

to create a pastiche is very much a part of Glanville-Hicks' creative technique in her operas. For example, for the libretto of *Sappho*, Glanville-Hicks largely cut and summarised Lawrence Durrell's play *Sappho* (1967), which was written in 1947, but also incorporated translated fragments of the poet Sappho. For the final aria of *Sappho*, Glanville-Hicks changed the ending of Durrell's play and included a poem from the work of the Canadian poet Bliss Carmen, *Sappho: One Hundred Lyrics* (1904). I have noted that her *Etruscan Concerto* has quotations from Lawrence's *Etruscan Places*.

In the opera *Sappho*, an Alexandrian, who would have to date after the foundation of Alexandria in 331, is included beside Sappho, who lived at least around three hundred years earlier, which also shows the mixture of features from different periods. In doing this, Glanville-Hicks follows Durrell's play *Sappho*, and, of course, as the author of *The Alexandria Quartet* (1962), he was interested in Alexandria, and this explains the anachronistic illusion.

Glanville-Hicks painted the mural in a style of the major artistic monuments of Greece, and with the use of models from Greek vase painting. These are from the region of Italy, Etruria, and are contemporary with the poet, Sappho, both of which were her great inspirations. She has adapted the male figure of one model to represent a woman, who is perhaps intended to be reminiscent of Glanville-Hicks. The mural is thus a pastiche of elements drawn from Greek vase painting, with changes and interpretations by the artist, which together create a work which is a reflection of Glanville-Hicks' life.

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