

Reflections of an Italian Journey on an Early Attic Lekythos?

JOAN R. MERTENS

Curator, Department of Greek and Roman Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

IN 1828 ANCIENT GREEK VASE PAINTING made its first significant appearance in modern Europe. The occasion was the discovery of an Etruscan necropolis filled with imported Athenian vases at Canino, near Vulci, by Lucien Bonaparte, a brother of Napoleon. Not only did the subsequent reemergence of Greek pottery occur, in large part, on north Italian soil, but during the last 150 years the role of the Etruscans as importers of Greek, principally Attic, vases has also been a focus of archaeological scholarship. One of the first achievements of this scholarship was the recognition that, although found in Etruria, the vases had actually been made in, and imported from, Greece proper. The decisive evidence lay in the inscriptions, written in perfect Greek, that many of them bore. As Dietrich von Bothmer has shown,¹ the Metropolitan Museum's amphora by the Taleides Painter—found in Sicily before 1800—was the first vase with an ancient potter's signature to come to light in modern times; Lucien Bonaparte would unearth many more at Canino.

Once the place of manufacture had been established for the thousands of fragments and whole vases that began to be found throughout the area of ancient Etruria, questions arose as to the connections between Attic ceramic workshops of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. and their Etruscan clientele. It has become an accepted fact that some products were made specifically for export. Of particular pertinence here are the Nicosthenic neck-amphorae and kyathoi, shapes of Etruscan origin that were reinterpreted in Athenian workshops and produced in quantity specifically for the Etruscan market. Two terracotta stands in the Metropolitan Museum illustrate this phenomenon on a very small scale; they must have been bespoke, for they are unique.² Study of the painted and incised inscriptions that marked batches of pots for shipment has

provided insights into the designation and accumulation of material for export.³ More than ever, scholars today are preoccupied with the commodities contained in these quantities of pottery,⁴ how the vases were understood by their importers,⁵ and what impact they may have had on Etruscan art and culture.⁶

As this preamble will indicate, the weight of evidence concerning Etruscan demand for Attic pottery lies almost entirely on the Etruscan side. Traces of Etruscan presence of any kind in Attica or in Attic art have proved to be minimal as well as elusive.⁷ Therefore, any glimmer or echo of such a presence seems worth noting. In this endeavor I should like briefly to reconsider a vase of the very early sixth century B.C. in Berlin and the group of iconographically related pieces that have been assembled around it.

Berlin V.I. 3764 (Figures 1–3) is a Deianeira lekythos characterized by an uninterrupted ovoid body, echinus foot, and cup-shaped mouth with pronounced drip ring; the shape was popular during the first quarter of the sixth century B.C. The vase is said to have been found in Greece. Originally attributed by Sir John Beazley to a painter working in the manner of the Gorgon Painter,⁸ it has recently been assigned by Dyfri Williams to the Deianeira Painter.⁹ In a subordinate zone occupying the top of the body, the decoration consists of a snaky creature with a fish tail and the head of a bearded man in its richly toothed mouth. In the main scene below, a pair of lions flank a bearded man; naked except for the baldric holding his sword and scabbard, the man looks back as he runs toward the right. Between the hindquarters of the two lions, below the handle of the lekythos, appears an unusual creation. It is made up of the bearded head of a man, shown in profile, set on top of a squat, roundish base; two incised lines mark the junction of the base and the human neck. This element in the decoration has been discussed repeatedly but never satisfactorily explained.

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Figure 2. Detail of lekythos in Figure 1



Figure 3. Detail of lekythos in Figure 1

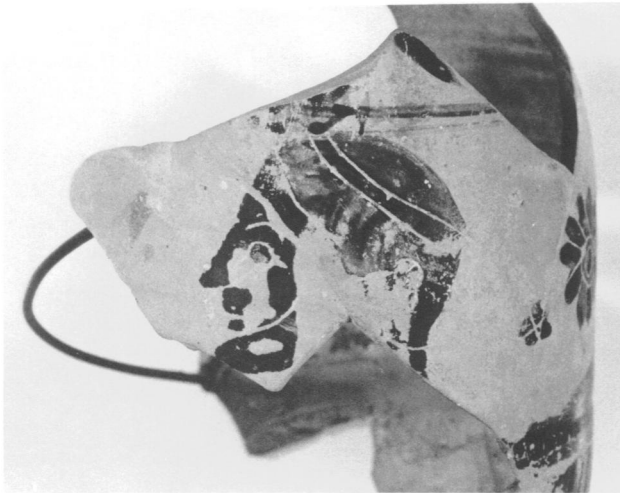
Figure 1. Lekythos, attributed to the Deianeira Painter, Greek (Attic), ca. 580 B.C. Terracotta, H. 26 cm. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, V.I. 3764 (photo: Jutta Tietz-Glagow, Antikensammlung, Berlin)



Figure 4. Lekythos, attributed to the Deianeira Painter, Greek (Attic), ca. 580 B.C. Terracotta, H. 24 cm. Nicosia, Cyprus Museum 1958, IV-22,3 (photo: Cyprus Museum)



Figure 5. Alternative view of lekythos in Figure 4



Figures 6, 7. Lekythos (two views), attributed to the Painter of the London Olpai, Greek (Attic), ca. 580 B.C. Terracotta, H. 18.8 cm. Basel, Herbert A. Cahn Collection 1410, 920, and 914 (photo: Herbert A. Cahn)

The man-headed form is known from other contemporary representations on Attic vases that have recently been brought together by Mary B. Moore.¹⁰ Most closely related, indeed by the same hand, is a Deianeira lekythos in Nicosia (Figures 4, 5), found at Polis tis Chrysochou.¹¹ The main scene on the body again shows a running man between lions; here, however, the figure wears a belted tunic and high boots. The man-headed object again appears below the handle. The base is somewhat squatter and more rounded than on the lekythos in Berlin; the head, however, shows the same distinctive detail of a fillet securing locks of hair that seem to be brushed upward at the middle of the forehead. The secondary scene, above, shows hounds coursing a hare.

A third lekythos with comparable iconography is in the collection of Herbert A. Cahn, Basel (Figures 6, 7). Dyfri Williams has attributed it to a follower of the Gorgon Painter whom he calls the Painter of the London Olpai.¹² On the body, the figure between two lions wears a belted tunic and boots; the head is evidently that of a woman. Interestingly, the fillet binding her hair is very like that of her male counterparts painted by the Deianeira Painter. Although the base of the man-headed object as well as the hindquarters of the lions are missing, the preserved elements are unmistakable. The narrow band above the main zone contains a wreath that seems to consist of fruit, such as olives or acorns, rather than leaves.

The other pertinent representations occur on amphorae. Athens, Agora P 24944¹³ preserves a bearded male head facing right; in front—or on top—of the base appears a thin, curving form that sug-

gests a snake (Figure 8). Copenhagen NM 13796,¹⁴ acquired on the Roman market, shows a pair of these male heads confronted; the bases have now lost their tautness and the execution is generally perfunctory. An oinochoe in the Humboldt University, Berlin (Figure 9), is one of two¹⁵ that have been associated with the aforementioned vases; the absence of the globular base below the profile head, however, places these pieces in a different iconographical category.

To date, scholarly discussion of the man-headed form has dealt with it as a bust. In his consideration of the Agora example, Homer Thompson spoke of “a very striking bearded head to which an abbreviated body is attached at the lower left; perhaps a male siren.”¹⁶ Ingeborg Scheibler sees an attempt to combine the bust of the deceased as depicted on funerary amphorae with birds as funerary symbols.¹⁷ Otfried von Vacano prefers to discern the first stages in the formulation of the bust as an iconographical motif,¹⁸ and Dyfri Williams also refers to the forms as busts. Although useful, these proposals remain inadequate because the execution of the Berlin lekythos is exceedingly competent, revealing no uncertainty in any aspect of the decoration; indeed, the Deianeira Painter has carefully but also very fluently drawn the man-headed form and articulated the container and significant details. In my opinion, he was depicting a real, self-contained object. What can have been the prototype?

Terracotta receptacles consisting of a plain, ro-tund base surmounted by a human head—usually male, occasionally female—represent a well-established class of object in Etruscan art of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.¹⁹ Although they are called

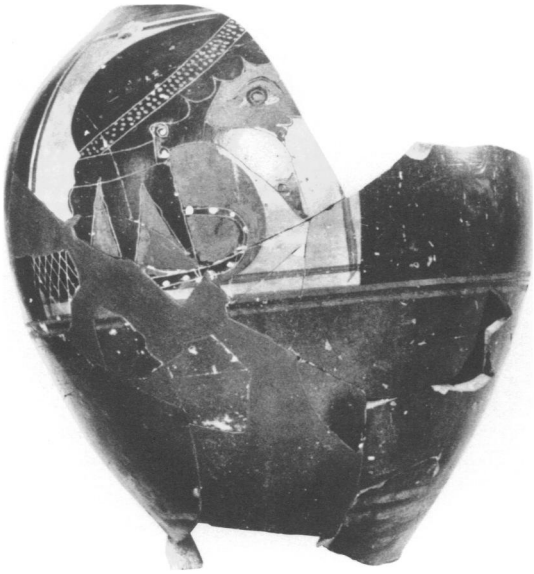


Figure 8. Fragment of an amphora, manner of the Gorgon Painter, Greek (Attic), first quarter of 6th century B.C. Terracotta, H. 24.9 cm. Athens, Agora P 24944 (photo: American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations)

canopic jars, they held the ashes of the deceased, not the viscera. A major center of their production and use seems to have been Chiusi. Funerary practice entailed the placement of these urns upon a thronelike or seatlike support within a very large storage jar at the bottom of a pit cut deep into the ground; most of the receptacles known today have been separated from their supports. There are four general areas of resemblance between the urns and the forms on the Berlin and Nicosia lekythoi. In each case the object is three-dimensional; the lower part narrows toward the mouth on the one hand, toward the base on the other; its surface—and general impression—is unarticulated, not to say rough; and the presence of a distinct neck-line indicates that the head is separable from the element below.

The corpus of surviving urns indicates the rather narrow range of variation in such details as the presence of handles or arms at the widest portion of the body, or the inclusion of a distinct foot (Figure 10). Within the rich collection of the Museo Archeologico, Florence, a few examples can be singled out as being particularly useful to our inquiry. Some, of the late seventh century, present an especially marked chin that can be interpreted as a beard (Figure 11).²⁰ There is also strong emphasis upon the eye.²¹ An exceptionally well-preserved and complete ensemble of head, urn, and throne even retains a pair of snaky creatures on the shoulder of the urn (Figure 12).²²

The hypothesis that these Etruscan objects prompt is that, in the course of commercial contact, knowledge of a canopic urn, or urns, reached the Athenian potters' quarter. While the export of Attic pottery was just gaining momentum in the earliest decades of the sixth century, the production of the Gorgon Painter and his workshop catered not only to the home market but also to customers as far away as Marseilles in the west and Naukratis in the Egyptian Delta. Vases of the workshop found in Etruria range from the ambitious mixing bowl with its stand now in the Louvre²³ to the *olpai* and *amphorae* that were turned out in greater number. The very fact that commercial relations between Athens and Etruria were still at an early stage suggests that the novelty of western practices and objects may also have been greater than a century later. Modern scholarship has not yet elucidated fully how the trade in pottery, or other commodities, was organized and whether Etruscan purchasers came to Athens. The export wares mentioned above—the Nicosthenic amphorae and other shapes—testify to the fact that dealings between the respective parties took place.²⁴ Because the man-headed forms on the Berlin and Nicosia lekythoi have no compelling antecedents or contemporary counterparts in Attic iconography, and because the canopic vases were an established type of equipment in an area with which traders—if not also artists—had contact, the Etruscan urns could well have been the source of inspiration.

Two further considerations may support the notion of Greeks journeying to Etruria. Canopic jars are not the only surviving Etruscan objects that



Figure 9. Oinochoe, manner of the Gorgon Painter, Greek (Attic), first quarter of 6th century B.C. Terracotta, H. 12.7 cm. Berlin, Humboldt-Universität, Winckelmann-Institut, D 384 (photo: Winckelmann-Institut)



Figure 10. Canopic jar, Etruscan, last quarter of 6th century B.C. Terracotta, H. 55.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, 1896, 96.9.50



Figure 11. Canopic jar, Etruscan, first quarter of 6th century B.C. Terracotta, H. 57.0 cm. Florence, Museo Archeologico 94612 (photo: Soprintendenza alle Antichità, Florence)

present a human head upon a rounded support. A famous and impressive bronze bust found in Vulci, now in the British Museum, shows the head of a woman and her upper body rising above a narrow, beltlike ring (Figure 13).²⁵ The bust is dated to the first quarter of the sixth century B.C. The torso of the figure is clearly articulated as human; the left arm is held against her chest and she holds a bird in her extended right hand. The present state of the object certainly does not represent its original appearance. However, in the treatment of the human body, the figure—whether divine or mortal—certainly bears a familial resemblance to the terracotta urns. Moreover, while it stands in relative stylistic isolation today, that would not have been the case in antiquity if indeed the piece was made in Vulci.²⁶ Thus, a Greek traveler to Etruria at the beginning of the sixth century would have seen a considerable variety of different objects that nonetheless were similar in appearance. It is impossible to gauge how much the ancient traveler would have known about the function and significance of the objects that he

saw. Most likely he was aware of the funerary purpose of the canopic jars. Given the primacy of the human figure in his own culture, he certainly responded to that element no matter how foreign the images might otherwise have appeared to him.

Finally, should the hypothesis advanced here have any validity for the representation under the handle of the Berlin and Nicosia lekythoi, the sea monster on the shoulder of the Berlin vase may be of more than purely decorative pertinence. Even if ancient seafarers avoided crossing open water and kept close to coastlines wherever possible, long-distance maritime journeys were perilous; abundant evidence exists in literature and works of art²⁷ for the fish-tailed serpent as a symbol of the dangers (Figure 14). With paradigmatic Greek terseness, the human head in the jaws of the Deianeira Painter's monster communicates an all too common fate.

Before an object such as the lekythos in Berlin, the modern interpreter becomes very aware that, while the artist or craftsman may enjoy considerable imaginative freedom, he himself does not. At the

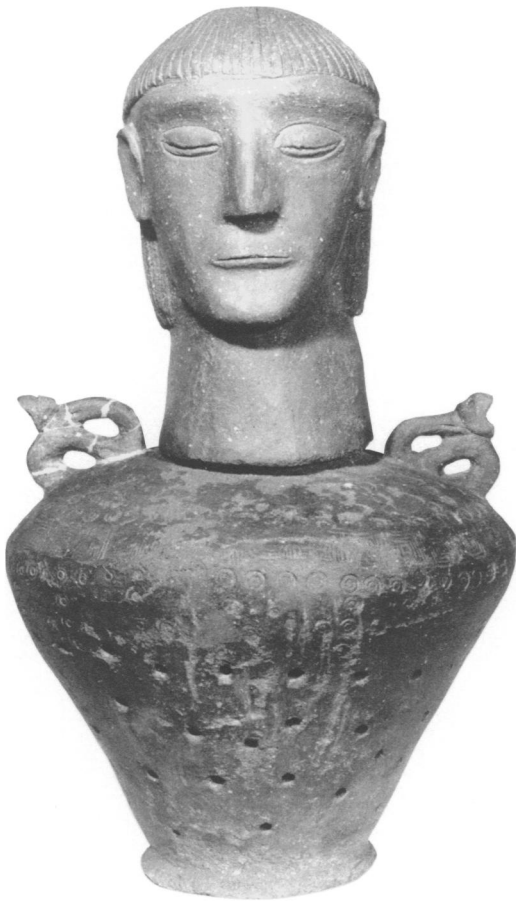


Figure 12. Canopic jar, Etruscan, first quarter of 6th century B.C. Terracotta, H. 52.5 cm. Florence, Museo Archeologico 72729 (photo: Soprintendenza alle Antichità, Florence)



Figure 13. Figure of a woman, Etruscan, first quarter of 6th century B.C. Bronze, H. 34 cm. London, British Museum GR 1850.2-27.15b and 16 (photo: Trustees of the British Museum)

risk of exaggerating and wrongly relating the iconographical ingredients of the Berlin vase, it has seemed worthwhile to call attention to what might be an exceptional early Attic response to a foreign motif. The man-headed form is rendered most meticulously and enthusiastically on the vase in Berlin, whereas the drawing on the Nicosia lekythos already appears derivative, less interested, and less interesting. The head on the fragment in the Agora is even more cursory; one wonders, however, whether the spotted snake occurs by association with the canopic jar, if that was the prototype. The confronted heads on the amphora in Copenhagen may belong to this iconographical category; it is at least as likely that they present a short-lived variant of the human head on the earliest panel amphorae.²⁸

The Deianeira Painter must be imagined as learning about the subjects that he depicted either from visual models or from verbal, undoubtedly oral, descriptions. The decoration of the lekythos conveys



Figure 14. Gem, Greek, last quarter of 7th century B.C. Steatite, L. 2.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Pulitzer Fund, 1942, 42.11.11.

the essence of a dangerous sea journey to the west. While it is not identifiably mythological, it is surely narrative. The question—as so often—is whether the vase painter is illustrating a tale current in his day, or whether the modern observer is inventing a tale from an ancient picture.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

1. Dietrich von Bothmer, "The Taleides Amphora," *MMAB* n.s. 5 (1947) pp. 221–228.
2. Idem, "A Unique Pair of Attic Vases," *Revue Archéologique* (1972) pp. 83–92.
3. Alan W. Johnston, *Trademarks on Greek Vases* (Warminster, 1979).
4. See, for instance, David W. Gill, "The Distribution of Greek Vases and Long Distance Trade," in *Ancient Greek and Related Pottery*, Jette Christiansen and Torben Melander, eds. (Copenhagen, 1988) pp. 175–181.
5. For instance, Nigel Spivey, "Greek Vases in Etruria," *Looking at Greek Vases*, Tom Rasmussen and Nigel Spivey, eds. (Cambridge, 1991) pp. 131–150.
6. For instance, Juliette de La Genière, "Images attiques et religiosité étrusque," *Ancient Greek and Related Pottery* (Copenhagen, 1988) pp. 161–167.
7. Brian Shefton, "Other Non-Corinthian Vases," *Perachora II* (Oxford, 1962) pp. 385–386; Marina Martelli, "I luoghi e i prodotti dello scambio," *Civiltà degli Etruschi* (Florence, 1985) esp. pp. 175–181.
8. John D. Beazley, *Attic Black-figure Vase-painters* [hereafter *ABV*] (Oxford, 1956) p. 11, no. 19.
9. Dyfri Williams, "In the Manner of the Gorgon Painter: The Deianeira Painter and Others," *Enthousiasmos* (Amsterdam, 1986) pp. 61–68.
10. Mary B. Moore, *The Athenian Agora: Attic Black-figured Pottery* (Princeton, N.J., 1986) p. 101. Moore does not mention the Deianeira lekythos, Florence 3740 (*ABV* p. 12, 21), which is decorated with a woman between two lions. The drawing published in the *Bollettino d'Arte* (1921) (fig. on p. 161) shows an irregularly rounded conformation at the left edge. Dr. DeTommaso has, however, kindly confirmed that there is no decoration below the handle.
11. John D. Beazley, *Paralipomena* (Oxford, 1971) p. 8, no. 19bis.
12. Williams, "In the Manner of the Gorgon Painter," pp. 66–67 and n. 34. Bettina Kreuzer, *Frühe Zeichner: Vasenfragmente der Sammlung H. A. Cahn, Basel* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1992) pp. 29–30, no. 18.
13. See note 10.
14. *ABV*, p. 714, 9bis; *Paralipomena* p. 7, 9bis above.
15. *ABV*, p. 10, 2 (Taranto) and 3 (Berlin).
16. Homer A. Thompson, "Activities in the Athenian Agora: 1955," *Hesperia* 25 (1956) p. 58.
17. Ingeborg Scheibler, "Olpen und Amphoren des Gorgomalers," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 76 (1961) p. 45 n. 144.
18. Otfried von Vacano, *Kopfbilder auf schwarzfigurigen Vasen* (Bonn, 1973) esp. pp. 153–154 n. 119.
19. A most useful summary of the material is provided by Robert D. Gempeler, *Die etruskischen Kanopen* (Küsnacht, 1974).
20. For instance, Florence, Museo Archeologico 94612 (Gempeler, *Die etruskischen Kanopen*, p. 37, no. 24); Florence, Museo Archeologico 72783 (*ibid.*, p. 39, no. 27).
21. For instance, Florence, Museo Archeologico 79197 (*ibid.*, p. 41, no. 29).
22. Florence, Museo Archeologico 72729 (*ibid.*, pp. 68–69, no. 58).
23. *ABV*, p. 8, 1.
24. See Martelli, "I luoghi e i prodotti dello scambio."
25. Sybille Haynes, "Zwei archaisch-etruskische Bildwerke aus Vulci," *Antike Plastik IV* (Berlin, 1965) pp. 15–25; idem, "The Bronze Bust from the 'Isis-Tomb' Reconsidered," *Studi Etruschi* 57 (1991) pp. 3–9; J. Swaddling, forthcoming.
26. Sybille Haynes, *Etruscan Bronzes* (London, 1985) pp. 252–253, no. 21.
27. Katharine Shepard, *The Fish-tailed Monster in Greek and Etruscan Art* (New York, 1940). A feature of the Berlin lekythos that seems so far to have been avoided by modern commentators is the inscription $\theta\omicron\pi\epsilon$ incised directly in front of the head of the sea serpent; it was evidently added after firing. The verb, a form of $\phi\omicron\pi\epsilon\omega$, functions as a kind of gloss on the image, saying "he is carrying it." One is leery of proposing an explanation that is so straightforward and obvious. On the other hand, it is worth remembering the predilection of Sophilos and Kleitias, the Gorgon Painter's artistic heirs, for labeling figures and occasionally even objects in their most important compositions. From this perspective, the inscription appears remarkable but not untoward.
28. *ABV*, p. 16, 2.