

BACCHIC EROTES AT TARENTUM

(PLATE LXVII)

GREEK artists and craftsmen in the course of a thousand years of ancient history passed through many phases of taste and expressed themselves in innumerable techniques. They also originated a large part of the world's iconography, even a larger percentage than is usually credited to them. It is always illuminating to discover the Greeks using a technique or symbol or exhibiting a taste not attributed to them previously. A group of vases with pastel colors and relief decoration, excavated at Tarentum, a South Italic city founded by Greek colonists, is a case in point. On vases belonging to this group there appears for the first time, executed by Greek hands, a scene which was copied by the Romans and by the successors of the Romans down to our own time: the baby Erotes engaged in the acts of men, specifically in bacchic revels.

The vases are tall and thin, with covers and with high bases (Plate LXVII, 1, 2). Usually they have two handles each. Friezes of figures in relief and curly leaves moulded separately and attached at critical points are the important decorative elements. Tongue patterns and necklaces supplement the decoration, all of which is confined to the fronts of the vases, showing that the intention was to place them against walls or in niches. The three or four horizontal ridges on each vase continue across the back.

The fabric is soft, light brown clay. White, pink, and gold occur on all the vases and some of them have additional colors. Every vase has been repaired. Since the colors are easy to imitate with water color on plaster, and since, except for the gold, they are inclined to run, it is extremely difficult to recognize the repaired and restored portions of the vases and to decide to which areas the various colors were originally applied.

Five vases of this ware are in American museums, three in the Metropolitan Museum and two in the Walters Art Gallery. These five use three subjects; there are two pairs and one single vase for which we may imagine a mate. Three vases depicting two of the same subjects have been previously published, with unsatisfactory illustrations. It is possible that they are additional pieces and are still in European collections, but equally possible that they are three of the five now in America. In the latter case, the United States may claim a monopoly on the extant specimens of this extraordinary ware.

Our Plate LXVII, 1 is in the Walters Art Gallery. It was formerly in the Massarenti Collection in Rome, and was listed in the catalogue of that collection as

having been found at Tarentum.¹ The body rests in a high, turned base at the top of which are three large acanthus leaves with projecting tips. There are two handles, with acanthus leaves at each point of attachment. The leaves are well shaped and veined. The body with its relief decoration was made in a mould. Just above the base is a band of tongues, about the middle are five little Eroles, and still higher up is a band of what might be classed as tongues, though they are rounded at both ends. A relief of pendants hanging from rosettes, in exact imitation of a Greek necklace, ornaments the front of the neck. The cover slopes up toward the center where there rises a group of three acanthus leaves and a stiff stalk which sprouts into leaves at the top.

Body and cover were coated with white slip; much of it is still preserved. The necklace is gilded, and so are the horizontal bands, below and above the frieze of Eroles and at the shoulder. The main frieze has pink spread over the figures as well as the background. There is a pink line on the cover and a gilt line, too; there is also pink paint from some design no longer recognizable. The vase has been extensively repaired; one handle has been reattached and there are cracks across the body, one crack cutting through the Eroles. Restorations which have been made over these damaged areas in pastel colors have been most skillful, and it is difficult to distinguish between the restored areas and the real surface.

The five Eroles on the front carry the following objects (beginning at our right): a pair of flutes; a torch and a pointed amphora; a torch and a pail; a cithar; and a long object, probably a thyrsos. The full significance of this procession of baby gods with these implements will become plain when we have considered some other vases.

The Walters Art Gallery has been fortunate in receiving a vase of this ware as a gift from Mr. James W. Barney (Plate LXVII, 2).² It has been broken and repaired, but has not been extensively restored. Parts of the cover and of the projecting acanthus leaves are missing. With the vase came a tag stating that it had been excavated at Tarentum. Gilt is well preserved on three bands which encircle the body, on the necklace, on the lip, on several of the objects in the hands of the participants and on their wings and draperies; also, on the upper part of the base. Pink is preserved over large areas, most noticeably in the tongues and on the background for the Eroles. The leaves are roughly shaped and lack details, which may have been rendered in paint.

A duplicate vase is in the Metropolitan Museum, having been acquired by purchase in 1896.³ It shows few signs of repair; on the other hand, the color is not well preserved. These two vases have identical covers, bases and handles. They are so

¹ Walters Art Gallery, no. 48.117. Ht. with cover, 23 inches (.585 m.). E. Van Esbrouck and others, *Catalogue du Musée au Palais Accoramboni*, pt. II, Rome, 1897, pp. 55 f., no. 246.

² Walters Art Gallery, no. 48.1942. Ht. with cover, 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (.493 m.).

³ Metropolitan Museum, no. G.R. 1017.

nearly alike that they must have been made in the same moulds, and possibly they were intended as mates. In the Tyskiewicz sale catalogue a similar vase was illustrated.⁴ It is difficult to ascertain whether this is a third example, or one of the two now in America. I feel fairly certain that it is not the one in the Metropolitan, but it might be the one in Baltimore.

On these two (or three) vases, each of the baby figures wears a piece of light drapery, passing across his back, surrounding his arms, and fluttering to the sides. The figure farthest to the spectator's right skips toward the center, carrying two small vases, one high on his left shoulder, one in his right hand held at knee level. The second runs toward the center, pouring from a pitcher held in his right hand into a saucer in his left hand. At the center of the scene is Eros poised on his left toe, holding a goat on his shoulder. Continuing toward our left, we meet an Eros trotting toward the center of the picture, with a single vase in both his outstretched hands. At the end comes the fifth Eros; above his head he swings a bow with his right hand. It is difficult to identify the object in his other hand, but it may be a torch.

Many of the attributes carried by the Erotes in the two scenes (on three or more vases) are vessels for serving and drinking wine. Clearly, as the Erotes so frequently imitate men at their duties and pleasures, they are engaged in a bacchic revel. The goat, the thyrsos if it is a thyrsos, the torches and the cithar prove that it is a revel, not a mere symposium. The bow may mean that one Eros is taking advantage of the woodland locale for hunting purposes. (Considering the rest of the scene, it probably is not for shooting the arrows of love).

To complete our record of this peculiar ware, we must mention some vases of the same technique but with different subjects. Two covered vases with pastel colors were excavated from a tomb at Tarentum and published by Lenormant in the *Gazette archéologique* for 1881-2.⁵ The bodies stood on separately made bases without being attached to them. There were no protruding acanthus leaves and no handles. Six figures, instead of being made with the body, were moulded separately and then attached. Due to this method of manufacture, a raised area was apparent around each figure. Two different arrangements of the figures were followed. The figures were: Athena with a palm branch; Nike holding a shield; a seated man and a standing woman, each playing a cithar; and two baby Erotes. The tongues were bounded by incised lines, not by relief lines as on the vases with the many Erotes. It was recorded that these vases had gold leaf and rich polychromy including blue on the necks.

The reproductions from photographs taken in 1881 leave much to be desired. It is impossible to decide whether or not a pair of vases which was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in 1896 is the same.⁶ Each corresponds to one of the others.

⁴ Froehner, Sale Catalogue, Tyskiewicz Collection, 1898, pl. 10:

⁵ Lenormant, in *Gazette archéologique*, VII, 1881-2, pp. 179 f., pl. 26.

⁶ Metropolitan Museum, nos. G.R. 1016, G.R. 1018.

in its arrangement of figures. The tongue patterns are rendered in the same way. Shapes of bases and handles are alike, and distinctly different from the other vases. The colors, as described by Miss Christine Alexander, are pink, reddish brown, blue, yellow, and gilt which is applied over yellow in some areas, in others over pink. Miss Alexander adds that it is impossible to ascertain the complete color scheme and that it probably was not the same on both vases. This color count is not at variance with that given in *Gazette archéologique*. The most noticeable differences are the handles on the Metropolitan vases, and the tufts of leaves on the stalks on the covers; the appendages are not present in the old illustrations. Since the handles and leaves are attached with glue, it is quite possible that the Metropolitan Museum acquired the original pair of vases, to which parts had been attached after the first photographs were taken.

As far as the subject is concerned, it is of little consequence whether one or two pairs of vases has been preserved. There are six figures arranged in two orders, and the scene is impossible of interpretation no matter which order is chosen. Clearly, the maker of the vase cared little about telling a story, and combined his figures at random. Yet we may hazard a guess as to the nearest pictorial representation to his: the judgment of Paris,⁷ with Paris represented as playing a musical instrument when the three goddesses came to consult him.⁸ Athena certainly belongs in the judgment scene and the Erotes are appropriate in any scene in which the susceptible Paris participates. Aphrodite should be there, and the semi-nude female with the cithar may be a substitute for her. Instead of Hera, the artist has introduced Nike, who is sometimes present in a subsidiary role at the judgment. I think it possible that the stamps used on these relief vases were intended for a representation of the judgment of Paris, and that the craftsman chose Paris, the Erotes, and any three female figures to fill the spaces on the vases. It would be impossible to prove this theory, however, and the scene cannot be said to have been explained.

Certainly this scene, whether or not it is the judgment of Paris, had many prototypes, but the scenes with the Erotes in action point forward in time.

The Greek Eros did not begin life as a chubby baby. In early Greek times he was a dignified youth. His transformation into a baby occurred during the Hellenistic period, and so did the multiplication of Eros into many Erotes. It was a baby, called Cupid, that the Romans loved and worshipped; but already among the terracotta statuettes of the Hellenistic Age winged baby gods were common. Many times the baby is associated with Aphrodite, and therefore preserves his original function of love-god. The scene which I have hypothesized to be the judgment of Paris includes

⁷ See the vase in the manner of Meidias in Karlsruhe, Furtwängler and Reichhold, *Griechische Vasenmalerei*, pl. 30.

⁸ On the subject in general see Roscher, *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, s. v. "Paris."

two little love-gods. In other cases, the identical figure or a group of such figures is engaged in acts which have no erotic significance. It may be incorrect even to refer to them as Erotes, but no better name suggests itself.⁹

A few examples are sufficient to show the development of this subject. Early in the Hellenistic period, in the late fourth or early third century B.C., we should place a vase (recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum) where, in polychrome relief against a background of black, two boy Erotes are giving a flying lesson to a baby Eros, in the presence of Aphrodite and Pan.¹⁰ On "Megarian" bowls of the late third century we meet pairs of winged babies, where Eros playing the double flutes alternates with Eros brandishing two pairs of what look like flutes but may be intended for clappers.¹¹ Baby Erotes are to be found on Hellenistic Pergamene ware, usually singly.¹² It is from early Roman days that we have the famous scenes of several Erotes participating in the tasks and pleasures of men, frequently those tasks and pleasures which are connected with the vine: the harvest of the grapes, or the vintage, or the bacchic orgy which attends the consumption of the wine, or the music which must accompany the orgy. Most familiar are the scenes on a silver cup from Boscoreale, where Erotes ride wild beasts,¹³ and the vintage and bacchic scenes in the latest Pompeian style of wall painting, in the House of the Vettii.¹⁴ Less famous but equally charming is an octagonal marble urn of the Augustan Age, having a vine pattern and seven Erotes dancing and playing musical instruments, and carrying torches and a lantern.¹⁵ An old controversy about the date of a large class of metal pans and jugs with bacchic Erotes has been settled, in my opinion, in favor of the Augustan Age.¹⁶ Single Eros figures occur, but rarely, on terra sigillata ware of the early empire.¹⁷ In later Roman times, scenes with Erotes are common on sarcophagi and their covers.¹⁸

Now where in this history shall we place the vases from Tarentum with the complete scenes of five Erotes with bacchic and musical implements? It would be difficult to assign a date to them later than the third century B.C. For, in the second

⁹ Birt, *Aus dem Leben der Antike*, 1922, p. 149, calls them children of the nymphs.

¹⁰ *Bul. Met. Mus.*, n. s. III, 1944-5, pp. 170 ff.

¹¹ Walters Art Gallery, no. 48.130. Cf. Baur, in *A.J.A.*, XLV, 1941, p. 235, fig. 4 (Perhaps Delian, end of 3rd century).

¹² Courby, *Les vases grecques à reliefs* (*Bib. des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome*, 125), 1922, pp. 458, 462 f.

¹³ Heron de Villefosse, *Mon. Piot*, V, 1899, pls. V, VI.

¹⁴ Reinach, *Répertoire de peintures*, p. 85, no. 5; p. 88, no. 5.

¹⁵ Reinach, *Répertoire de reliefs*, III, p. 185, no. 3; Weege, *Der Tanz in der Antike*, 1926, p. 173, fig. 243.

¹⁶ A. Radnoti, *Die römischen Bronzegefässe von Pannonien* (*Dissertationes Pannonicae*, II, 6), 1938, pp. 16-18.

¹⁷ H. F. De Cou, *Antiquities from Boscoreale in Field Museum of Natural History* (Field Museum, publication 152. Anthropological Series. Vol. VII, no. 4), 1912, pp. 203 ff., pls. CVI f.

¹⁸ Baumeister, *Denkmäler*, I, p. 447, fig. 495. Two examples in the Walters Art Gallery, Lehmann-Hartleben and Olsen, *Dionysiac Sarcophagi in Baltimore*, 1942, figs. 9, 27.

Punic War at the end of this century, Rome overcame Tarentum and paraded its captured wealth in a costly triumph. Tarentum was a poor town ever after. It is improbable that the Tarentines after their conquest possessed expensive items, and the polychrome vases must certainly have been expensive, though not the equal of the gorgeous native metalware. Lenormant, in discussing one pair of the vases, unhesitatingly dated them about the middle of the third century, and he seems to have known something of the circumstances of excavation, since he remarked that the most valuable objects were early removed from the tomb. The excavational evidence, then, seems to point toward a third-century date.

Decorative patterns and technique tend to date these vases early in the Hellenistic period. Polychromy is characteristic not only of the terracotta statuettes of this age, but of many pottery wares. The gilt necklaces are usual on black-glazed vases which begin in Greece in the fourth century B.C. and continue for a short time there; and more elaborate painting is characteristic of the Italian vases, called "Gnathia" ware, which are slightly later in date.¹⁹ Pastel colors were frequently added to Kertch vases, which were a developed Attic ware, essentially red-figured. A little-known but very interesting vase found at Olbia is black glazed as to its body, but the shoulders, neck, handles, and covers are polychrome.²⁰ Plastic heads on the handles, floral patterns in relief on the shoulder, and leaves partly in relief and partly in the round attached beside the handles, are its main decorations. The black glaze connects it with early wares, the color and character of the decoration link it with our vases from Tarentum. We mentioned before the polychrome Eroses on a black-glazed vase. There is also a hydria from Cumae with two polychrome reliefs and a black-glazed background.²¹ A very famous vase, perhaps as early as the second half of the fourth century B.C., is a hydria with the Calydonian boar-hunt represented in pastel-colored relief against a gilded background, without any black glaze.²² We might mention, too, the silvered vases which come from Orvieto and its neighbor, Bolsena, in Etruria.²³ They show a preference for bizarre shapes and large reliefs, and must have been made after 265 B.C. An isolated vase, not easy to date but certainly no later than the mid-Hellenistic period, is a covered amphora, white slipped, with heads in relief and a painted necklace, found at Tanagra in Greece.²⁴ Canosa in South Italy produced polychrome vases with little

¹⁹ *B.C.H.*, 35, 1911, pp. 22 ff. Notice especially pl. V, a krater of black glaze, ornamented in polychrome with Eroses guiding a griffon chariot.

²⁰ K. Trever, "Eine polychrome Amphora aus Olbia," *Materialy po arkheologii Rossii*, no. 36, 1918.

²¹ *Compte rendu*, 1862, pl. 3; Stephani, *Vasensammlung der Ermitage*, no. 525; S. Reinach, *Répertoire des vases peints*, I, p. 11.

²² *Mon. Piot*, X, 1903, pp. 39 ff.

²³ Richter, *Handbook of the Etruscan Collection*, p. 53, figs. 165 ff.; Zahn, *Berliner Museen*, LV, 1935, p. 7, right; Ducati, *Storia dell'Arte Etrusca*, pp. 457 f., 513, 561; Pagenstecher, *Calenische Reliefkeramik (Jh. Arch. I., Ergänz. VIII)*, p. 20; Walters, *History of Ancient Pottery*, I, pp. 73 f., 501.

²⁴ Neugebauer, *Führer durch das Antiquarium II. Vasen*, 1932, p. 174, no. F 2883, p. 94.

or much relief. Some Canosa vases even have statuettes applied as decorations.²⁵ Finally, there is a class of polychrome vases from Centuripe, Sicily. These have decoration on one side only. They have been dated later than most of the polychrome wares, that is, in the second or even in the first century B.C.²⁶ There are a few later polychrome wares, inferior and easily recognizable from the Hellenistic.

The foregoing examples are sufficient to show that Polychrome relief wares were characteristic of the Hellenistic Age. We can date our vases in the third century B.C. The confirmation of this date from the history of Tarentum is satisfactory. Because of the indestructibility of pottery, and its consequent good preservation, we may say that this date is fairly well established. In comparison, the dating of metal and silver objects with Erotes may be considered uncertain, because of the scarcity of metal objects.

The establishment of these vases in the third century B.C. is important. I have been unable to locate a single other example of Erotes in complete scenes copied from the lives of men at so early a date. The earliest examples given above were Augustan. That there were Hellenistic prototypes for the Augustan works of art as well as for Roman literature has never been doubted, but until now no artistic prototype and few real literary references could be shown.²⁷ However, one was at hand, though it could not be interpreted. In the "Tarentine Treasure" discovered in 1896 and dated as a whole before 272 B.C., the time of the war with Pyrrhus, on the evidence of coins was a silver kantharos of elongated and elaborate form and very unusual decoration. Among the decorations are a garland surrounding the body and, under each handle, a chubby baby. One baby carries a pointed amphora, the other a torch and a kantharos. Wuilleumier interpreted these figures as genii, one of wine and the other of water.²⁸ Excitedly he remarked that the chubby baby type, here occurring at Tarentum in the third century and on an object of Tarentine manufacture, was usually associated with Asia Minor in the second (referring, I suppose, to Pergamene ware and to statuettes). This opinion he later repeated, but in the second instance he called the figures Erotes and adduced as parallels a set of busts of baby Erotes on a gold amphora found at Tarentum and some Tarentine terracottas of winged babies.²⁹ Picard proposed a Dionysiac interpretation for the figures on the silver vase, accepted the date before 272, but denied the local origin.³⁰ Courby dated it in the second half of the third

²⁵ *Not. Scav.*, 1899, pp. 300-302; *Röm. Mit.*, 29, 1914, pp. 116 ff., pls. VIII-X; *Not. Scav.*, 1898, p. 216; Neugebauer, *op. cit.*, p. 95; other works on polychrome vases generally are Pottier, *Mon. Piot*, XX, 1913, pp. 163 ff.; Picard, *R.A.*, ser. IV, vol. XXII, 1913, pp. 161 ff.

²⁶ Richter, *Bul. Met. Mus.*, 26, 1931, p. 123 and *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, II, 1929-1930, pp. 187-205; Libertini, *Centuripe*, 1926, *passim*; Pace, *Ausonia*, VIII, 1913, pp. 27 ff.

²⁷ Birt, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

²⁸ Wuilleumier, *Le Trésor de Tarente*, 1930, pp. 42-46; *Not. Scav.*, 1896, pp. 380 f., figs. 5-6.

²⁹ Wuilleumier, *Tarente des origines à la conquête romaine* (*Bib. des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome*, 148), 1939, pp. 352 f. Cf. the statuettes since found at Tarentum, *Not. Scav.*, 1936, p. 137, fig. 27, p. 182, fig. 93.

³⁰ Picard, *R.A.*, ser. V, vol. 33, 1931, p. 357; *R.A.*, ser. VI, vol. XXV, 1946, pp. 181 f.

century B.C., suggesting an Alexandrian origin, and Mayer felt that it must have originated after the Pyrrhic War, and suggested that it may have been buried at the commencement of the Punic War.³¹

Perhaps Wuilleumier would have been even more excited had he known of vases from Tarentum with baby figures fitted with wings, carrying full bacchic equipment and therefore apparently participating in the Dionysiac cult which was popular at Tarentum. These pottery vases help us to identify the figures on the silver kantharos as Erotes in a thiasos, detached from their proper environment and denied their wings. Other isolated Erotes with musical or bacchic implements, occurring in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods may henceforth be interpreted as members detached from complicated scenes, rather than as forerunners of a scene yet to be invented.

At the present time it would be foolish to hazard opinions about the cult implications of the scenes, or even to try to decide whether or not the figures should, strictly speaking, be called Erotes. The correct name would have to be learned from literary sources. A little investigation discloses that our knowledge of Erotes in Hellenistic literature is almost as scanty as the artistic remains, and that this literature is in large part a reconstruction from Roman sources. References to multiple loves in Theocritus and Bion and Moschus conjure up nebulous figures, and Catullus is of no real help. Lucian and Philostratus are our chief sources of information about Erotes in Hellenistic literature, and they are very indirect sources indeed. The enthusiasm with which critics have seized upon a little fragment of Archytas of Tarentum, and compared it with a scene on a Roman sarcophagus on which children serve at a drinking bout, is an indication of the terrific paucity of real knowledge.³²

It would be equally foolish, at the moment, to come to any conclusion about the relationship of Tarentum to Alexandria and to Asia Minor. Three pottery vessels and one silver one are insufficient to establish originality of ideas. It is highly probable that our pottery was made at Tarentum, since five examples of the ware have been found there and none elsewhere. Yet we have no right to assume that the subject was unknown at Alexandria or elsewhere.

What is established is the presence of groups of baby gods, engaged in acts definitely bacchic and definitely not erotic, at Tarentum in the third century B.C. The three Tarentine vases with their two subjects, divided between the Metropolitan Museum and the Walters Art Gallery, are sufficient to prove the antiquity of the iconography. The close correspondence of these Tarentine objects to the Roman is reassuring, since it shows that we have not been altogether wrong in our reconstruction of Hellenistic scenes from Roman.

DOROTHY KENT HILL

THE WALTERS ART GALLERY

³¹ M. Mayer, *Not. Scav.*, 1898, p. 215; Mayer, *Coppa Tarantina* (Commissione provinciale di archeologia e storia patria, *Documenti e Monografie*, vol. IX), Bari, 1910, p. 28; Courby, *op. cit.*, p. 508; Courby, *Rev. Univ. Lyon*, 1933, p. 200.

³² Birt, *op. cit.*, p. 143 and pl. 8.



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Polychrome Amphoras from Tarentum. Bacchic Erotes. Baltimore, The Walters Art Gallery
HILL: BACCHIC EROTES AT TARENTUM