

## A BLACK-FIGURED LEKYTHOS AT OBERLIN

Among recent acquisitions of the Oberlin College Art Museum is the very interesting Attic Black-Figured lekythos figured below.<sup>1</sup> Its measurements are as follows: height 20.7 cm., diameter at shoulder 10.5 cm., diameter at base 6.3 cm., greatest diameter 11.7 cm. The handle of the vase has been restored, and, if there was any inscription or signature, it has disappeared with the original handle. Parts of the decorative rose coloring of the hair and garments of the figures have also suffered slightly. The shape and outward characteristics of the vase suggest a date *ca.* 540 B.C. In place of the black band and drip ring of the neck, which appear on earlier lekythoi, there is the red ridge, typical of the period 540-530, and the shoulder has been utilized fully for the scene of Herakles in pursuit of an Amazon.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, there are good reasons for not selecting a date later in the decade. The body itself is not broad and still retains the slender features of the preceding period. As a result, the picture on the body has not been reduced in height. Furthermore, although the shoulder has become prominent from the artist's point of view, it has not been flattened out into a nearly horizontal field. The mouth differs from the bulging mouths of earlier vases, but it has not developed into the echinus contours which one expects after 540 B.C.

The problem of attributing an unsigned vase is often speculative at best, and the Oberlin vase does not invite any obvious conclusions about its painter. Quite apart from the two scenes depicted, the style is definitely not that of a master employing all his skill. Rather one is struck by the apparent haste of execution. The elbows and feet of the figures are very carelessly and unnaturally represented with a complete disregard for any suggestion of anatomical accuracy. Most of the incised work also seems to have been added almost grudgingly, and many of the incisions are very rough, although this might as easily be the result of the ravages of time as of the indifference of the artist.

Disregarding for the moment the subjects of the compositions, one cannot fail to notice immediately certain striking similarities to many of the known masters and workshops of the time. Separately, each detail falls short of the work of the master

<sup>1</sup> I am deeply indebted to Prof. H. R. W. Smith, Mr. D. A. Amyx, and Mr. D. von Bothmer whose interest and kindly suggestions have been invaluable. I wish also to express my thanks to Prof. Clarence Ward for permission to publish this vase. The photographs were taken by Mr. A. E. Princehorn of Oberlin.

<sup>2</sup> This and the following comments are based upon the principles of Miss C. H. E. Haspels, *Attic Black-Figured Lekythoi*, pp. 19 and 33.

which it resembles, but not so much as not to be easily recognized. Very obvious are two features which recall the technique of the Amasis painter and his circle. The gestures in the left of both pictures are typically Amasean, with the long hands expressively extended. Also peculiar to this school of artists was the use of scanty robes



Fig. 1. B.-F. Lekythos at Oberlin

for the figures. For Herakles and his companion on the shoulder of the Oberlin vase, the artist bothers only with the merest suggestion of clothing. This is a general practice in the Heidelberg Group and the work of the Amasis painter, *Elbows Out*, etc. On the other hand, however, the painter of the Oberlin lekythos exhibits none of the Oriental love and care for incised details so typical of the Amasis painter's work.

More striking yet, perhaps, are the parallelisms between the Oberlin vase and the work of the Wraith painter.<sup>3</sup> Miss Haspels' description of the latter's figures could well apply to those of our own lekythos. "They glide past like wraiths, boneless, two-dimensional. They resemble *Elbows Out* without elbows."<sup>4</sup> The law of the broadest aspect is fundamental with our artist except for the two figures at the right in the scene on the body. By leaving the flesh of the female black the technique of the Oberlin vase follows a principle which, save for isolated examples, the Wraith painter was the first to adopt as a common practice.<sup>5</sup> Further similarities can be noted

in certain anatomical renderings of parts of the body such as the chest, but on the whole the Wraith painter is a little more careful and detailed. The renderings of garment decoration, hair, and fully clad figures are contrasts between the two, which are not likely to have been produced by a single hand. The stance of the Wraith

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Haspels, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 f. and plates 9, 3 and 5; 11, 1 and 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> For these isolated examples see Haspels, *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 19, 21, 27, 31.

painter's women is so distinctive as to be nearly a signature, which is lacking in the Oberlin vase.

The compositions of our vase also recall certain interesting parallelisms to the styles of other painters. The shoulder scene is similar in style and subject to the work



Fig. 2. Shoulder of Oberlin Lekythos

of the Sandal painter. Compare in particular the fragmentary lekythos, Oxford 1934.353, depicting the Amazonomachy on the body and a woman pursued by satyrs on the shoulder.<sup>6</sup> The Oberlin vase is also reminiscent of the earlier little-master cup by Phrynos (B. M. B 424).<sup>7</sup> To be sure, again the details are lacking in the later work,

<sup>6</sup> See Haspels, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 f.; plates 5, 2, and 6, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Beazeley, *Attic Black-Figure--A Sketch*, pp. 6 ff.; plate I, 1-2. Also *C.V.A.*, British Museum, III H e, pl. 13, 2.

but it does carry over certain archaic features of its predecessor in the round eye and the Amazon's garment (cf. that of Hephaistos). Another comparison may be made between the rendering of the heads on our vase and that on a lip-cup from Selinus in Palermo which resembles the work of Charitaios.<sup>8</sup>

For one other stylistic peculiarity of the Oberlin lekythos, which escaped my attention, I am indebted to Mr. Amyx. The vertical line in front of the face of the filleted dignitary in the body composition at first glance appears to be a stray stroke because of the dark drop at its bottom extremity. Mr. Amyx observes, however, that this is a shaftless spearhead, a curious technique of omission not uncommon in the period. Notoriously forgetful of swords and spears is the Swinger.<sup>9</sup> We find a further omission in the Oberlin vase in the absence of the bowstring on the shoulder, and as a result, one may well conjecture as to whether the clenched hands of several of the other figures may not be gripping imaginary objects.

The curious mixture of styles leaves a vague impression of the artist of our vase. Clearly not one of the known great masters, but close to several, the painter of the Oberlin vase is identified best as a mannerist of the Amasis painter's circle and the Wraith painter's school. His style represents a sort of *koine*, not fine enough, perhaps, to warrant him the impressive title of the Oberlin vase-painter, but important as representing a combination of artistic elements, reduced though they may be in quality.

Of the two scenes on the Oberlin vase, that on the shoulder is the more interesting. The spirited pursuit by Herakles of the Amazon raises several problems connected with the familiar story of the quest for the girdle of Hippolyte. The attitude of Herakles in the picture is apparently that of "your girdle or your life," leading one to assume that the woman is Hippolyte herself. Mr. Dietrich von Bothmer, however, whose acquaintance with Amazons exceeds mine, has pointed out to me that Amazons who use a bow and arrow in general represent the rank and file of the Amazon army. The royalty, he assures me, are usually clad in armor, and therefore this should not be considered the queen. What the artist intended can not be determined. Nevertheless, there is no doubt as to the myth involved, whether the scene be thought of as the chief incident, as the battle that followed the refusal of the girdle, or as simply a suggestion of the whole story. Mr. Bothmer further observes that the Phrygian cap of the Amazon is of particular interest, because on the Oberlin vase we find one of the earliest representations of it.

The flanking figure to the right, which serves to balance the scheme much as the lotus buds, defies any definite identification. Perhaps it would be better to resist the inevitable temptation and simply call the figure an artistic device to complete an heraldic

<sup>8</sup> Gabrici, "Vasi greci . . . di Palermo e Agrigento," figs. 1 and 10 (*Atti R. Acc. di Palermo*, XV, 1928-29).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Albizzati, *Vasi antichi dipinti del Vaticano*, pl. 44, 349.

arrangement. Still it is not unreasonable to suggest that this might be a particular companion of Herakles. His constant comrade during the Labors was Iolaos, but literary references to Iolaos' participation in the exploit against the Amazons are noticeably infrequent. To be sure, he is conceded a prominent place in the assault on Troy during the same trip in a veiled passage of Pindar in which the name Iolaos is used figuratively for that of Herakles as the leader.<sup>10</sup> Closer examination of this and related evidence, however, reveals that Telamon was a far more important figure in both stories. His entrance into Troy ahead of Herakles and his receiving of Hesione are two of the most striking episodes of the Trojan expedition.<sup>11</sup> Telamon's achievement against the Amazons is related by a scholion attributed to Hesiod (fr. 278) on the passage of Pindar referred to above:

Τελαμὼν ἀκόρητος αὐτῆς  
 ἡμετέροις ἐτάροισι φόως πρότιστος ἔθηκε  
 κτείνας ἀνδρολέτειραν ἀμώμητον Μελανίππην,  
 αὐτοκασιγνήτην χρυσοζώνιοι ἀνάσσης.

It would not be an isolated phenomenon in vase-painting for Telamon to be engaged in the Amazonomachy,<sup>12</sup> although as I have already suggested any attempt to name our figure is extremely hazardous. Therefore, I leave the matter as one entirely of choice, with my own preference being Telamon if identification is required.

The scene on the body of the Oberlin vase is as indefinite as our so-called Telamon. Here again one is tempted to connect the four gentlemen in some way with the myth being enacted on the shoulder. The complete lack of attributes for the figures, however, makes the problem conjectural at best. It is probably safer to assume that here we have a purely *genre* scene. Whether or not the conversation hinges on the action pictured on the shoulder is again simply a matter of choice.

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<sup>10</sup> *Nem.*, III, 61 ff. ed. Schroeder; 38 ff. ed. Bowra; 36 ff. ed. Farnell.

--- Λαομέδοντα δ' εἰρυσθενῆς  
 Τελαμὼν Ἴολα παραστάτας ἐὼν ἔπερσεν·  
 καὶ ποτε χαλκότοξον Ἀμαζόνων μετ' ἄλκην  
 ἔπετό οἱ, οὐδέ νῦν ποτε φόβος ἀνδροδάμας  
 ἔπαυσεν ἀκμῶν φρενῶν.

Cf. also the scholia on the passage. The use of the word *χαλκότοξον* as descriptive of the Amazons is interesting in the light of Mr. Bothmer's observations above, but here again there is nothing to indicate that the adjective is not simply descriptive of the Amazon army in general.

<sup>11</sup> Apollod., *Bibl.*, II, 135 f.; Hyg., *Fab.*, 89.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *dinos* in Louvre, E 875; *C.V.A.*, Louvre 2, text p. 11, plates 18-20.