

A LATE CORINTHIAN PERSEUS FROM ANCIENT CORINTH

(PLATE 16)

THE SMALL FRAGMENT to be discussed was excavated in 1965 in the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, Ancient Corinth. It came from within a dining room on the Middle Terrace, in a dumped fill of mostly 4th-century material:¹

Corinth inv. no. C-65-519

Pl. 16

P.H. 0.052 m., p.W. 0.096 m., Th. 0.011 m. except at center of sloping right break, where a slightly greater thickness indicates the beginning of the handle attachment. Corinthian clay: Munsell 10YR 8/3 (very pale brown). Diluted clay slip for decoration, fired brown and peeling; no exterior red wash. Wheel groove below register band; register band unevenly painted. Interior undecorated.

Lower register: goat to left, two small incised lines on hindquarters; head missing; tail and bent rear

leg-joint of feline to right at right break. No filling ornament. Upper register: trace of paint at right break, either foot and hem of shirt, or more likely, part of palmette or other design under handle. Male running right in *knielauf* position, preserved to waist; thigh of rear leg, genitals incised; advancing left leg with wing curving back from ankle; right leg ended at ankle by break; line below either part of figure's foot or more probably, advancing leg of second figure.² Between the legs:

PERSEUS (see Pl. 16:b)

The shape is problematic.³ Although the fragment comes from a closed vase, it is not easy to determine precisely the original form. The small size and the design under the handle preclude most closed shapes (hydriai, broad-bottomed oinochoai, and the like), whose verti-

¹ Pottery lot 4356; grid square O-P:22-23. See the plan in *Hesperia* 43, 1974, pp. 268-269, fig. 1. The lot contains fragments of a late Attic red-figured krater and other typical 4th-century material, but also part of a Middle Corinthian (MC) kotyle. All the pottery will appear in a volume of the Corinth Excavations series. I wish to express my thanks to C. K. Williams, II, Corinth Field Director, and Nancy Bookidis, Corinth Secretary, who read a preliminary draft of this manuscript. D. A. Amyx also gave valuable criticisms and corrections. They are not responsible for any errors. The photograph is by L. Bartzioti and I. Ioannidou, the drawing by D. Peck.

Works frequently cited are abbreviated as follows:

Brommer = F. Brommer, *Vasenlisten*, Marburg 1973

Fittschen = K. Fittschen, *Untersuchungen zum Beginn der Sagenarstellungen*, Berlin 1969

Schauenberg = K. Schauenberg, *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums*, Bonn 1960

von Steuben = H. von Steuben, *Frühe Sagenarstellungen in Korinth und Athen*, Berlin 1968

² Compare an example of the same scene on a neck-amphora in the British Museum (B 281; *ABV*, p. 606, no. 13), wherein Athena's advancing leg and Perseus' rear leg overlap in similar fashion.

³ Deceived by black specks on the interior wall, which I took to be the remains of paint, I originally thought that the fragment came from an extremely small column-krater. But puzzled by the small size, D. A. Amyx and S. Bouzaki, the Corinth Conservator, examined it under a high-powered microscope and determined that those specks were from the soil, not the remains of a slip. The interior was never glazed; the vessel was closed, not open. Amyx suggested that the shape might be a globular pyxis with three heads.

cal strap handles usually rise from the band dividing the registers. A very small amphora or small, two-row trefoil oinochoe would be possible. The most probable shape is the globular pyxis with upright handles; yet the rather abrupt shift in vertical curvature discernible in the sherd is not characteristic of that pyxis form. Moreover, the form with upright handles is more usually decorated on the shoulder with tongues.

The letter forms of “Perseus” are characteristic of the 6th century. The angular rho is found even in the 5th century on the gravestone of the Corinthians on Salamis. The cursive quality of the letters, well described as informal, is typical of dipinti on Corinthian vases.⁴ The only other extant example of the name Perseus on a Corinthian vase is the dipinto on the Berlin amphora, showing Perseus’ rescue of Andromeda.⁵ There the name is written retrograde, with a more cursive rho but a similar two-stroke upsilon.

The drawing is quite poor. The taut anatomical rendering found in much Corinthian painting has disappeared, replaced by swollen joints, thick tails, lumpy outlines. The animals are caricatures of their predecessors. There are few criteria for dating the fragment; it would appear to be Late Corinthian (LC), although the low quality of drawing is not necessarily indicative of a late date. But the shape, the use of a mythological scene, and the syntax of the registers all suggest a date about the middle of the 6th century. The surface of the fragment is in sorry condition, caused not by poor ceramic technique but by the “ceramophagus” nature of the soil in the Demeter Sanctuary. It is, therefore, quite clear that the fragment is a minor example of Corinthian vase painting.

The only reason for cataloguing the sherd was, in fact, the dipinto, identifying a scene rare in Corinthian vase painting. Indeed, the representation of Perseus is not common in Corinth, nor in areas presumed to be under Corinthian influence.⁶ He appears on a Theron metope; his presence is implied in the Corfu pediment. Objects showing Perseus and the Gorgons have been attributed to Corinth, such as shield-band fragments, a relief in New York, a perirrhantion fragment from the Argive Heraion.⁷ There are a few ceramic examples; a LC krater fragment in Oxford showing the birth of Pegasus, without Perseus extant but conceivably present on the missing area; one fragment from Perachora may show Perseus fleeing; a fragmentary Protocorinthian (PC) kotyle found in Aigina may be a representation of the slaying of Medusa.⁸ There are also many gorgoneia on Corinthian vases.

⁴ R. S. Stroud will comment more extensively on the letter forms in his publication of all inscriptions and dipinti found in the Demeter Sanctuary. For the cursive quality and the form of the rho, see L. H. Jeffery, *Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*, Oxford 1961: Corinth, pp. 114–132, esp. pp. 116, 119–120, 126–127. See also R. Arena, “Le iscrizioni corinzie su vasi,” *MemLinc*, ser. 8, 13, fasc. 2, Rome 1967, pp. 53–142; H. Lorber, *Inschriften auf korinthischen Vasen (Archäologische Forschungen 6)*, Berlin 1979.

⁵ H. Payne, *Necrocorinthia*, reprinted College Park 1971, no. 1431; Arena, *op. cit.*, no. 57; Lorber, *op. cit.*, no. 88.

⁶ For discussions of Perseus, see Schauenberg, esp. pp. 32ff.; von Steuben, pp. 13–17, catalogue pp. 111–112; Fittschen, pp. 152–157. For vase representations, see Brommer, pp. 274–283.

⁷ For the shield bands: von Steuben catalogue K2 and K9–K10 (Medusa alone). New York relief: Fittschen catalogue SB 43. Perirrhantion: Fittschen SB 46 (with Hermes, one Gorgon). But attribution of such objects to Corinthian workmanship cannot be certain.

⁸ Oxford 130.12: von Steuben K4, Brommer, p. 288, C3. Perachora: von Steuben K8. Aigina kotyle: von Steuben K1, and see Brommer, p. 275. Other Corinthian vases with Gorgons are listed in Brommer, p. 281 (including the Kavalla vase; see below).

The best known 6th-century Corinthian Perseus appears on the Berlin vase, cited above, showing the freeing of Andromeda. In 1976, a fine, red-ground krater sherd was found in Corinth with the lower part of a winged woman in the *knielauf* pose, running to the right; she may be a pursuing Gorgon.⁹

The most comparable Corinthian representation is on a fragmentary, red-ground column-krater in Kavalla. Only the larger section that shows parts of two pursuing Gorgons has been published.¹⁰ Yet displayed with it, and clearly from the same vase, is a fragment that shows a black foot running right, with incised lines on the ankle indicating the wing attachment. Beneath the figures of the narrative register on both fragments is the same wavy glaze line, suggestive of the terrain of the pursuit (hills, sea?).¹¹ As on the Demeter example, the black foot comes just before the handle attachment, below which there is painted a bird. The black foot surely is the preserved remains of a Perseus similar to the one under discussion.¹²

Since no complete representation of the pursuit of Perseus by the Gorgons appears to be extant in Corinthian vase painting, one may tentatively suggest a reconstruction through other black-figured fabrics, most especially Attic.¹³ The examples may differ in the cast and order of the characters, yet certain elements appear to be constant. On almost all the vases, the action proceeds from left to right, with Perseus at the front, by the right handle or border. There are three exceptions known to me. On a pyxis lid in the Louvre most of the figures run to the left; only Pegasos moves to the right from the dead Medusa.¹⁴ On a lekythos in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Perseus flees between the standing Hermes (at the extreme right) and Athena.¹⁵ On a late black-figured lekythos Hermes and Perseus are both running to the right, but Hermes is at the right side, Perseus at the left, Athena between them.¹⁶ On this vase the men are very similar. Hermes carries the kerykeion and wears a

⁹ Corinth inv. no. C-76-288, from the excavations on Temple Hill. I am grateful for Henry S. Robinson's permission to mention this exceptional fragment.

¹⁰ Brommer, p. 281, C7; von Steuben K5; Lorber, *op. cit.* (footnote 4 above), no. 131. The dipinti of the Gorgons are discussed by A. Boegehold, "Korinthiaka II: A Neglected Gorgon," *GRBS* 15, 1974, p. 34, note 5, and A. Johnston, "Two-and-a-half Corinthian Dipinti," *BSA* 68, 1973, pp. 181–185, with previous bibliography. The second fragment, with the foot of Perseus, was seen in the Kavalla Museum, August 1980. It is noted by Johnston, p. 181.

¹¹ As on Attic examples: the sea is represented on a skyphos in Hamburg by the Painter of Rodin 1000 (*ABV*, p. 521, no. 2; Brommer, p. 278, A19); the mountains on a neck-amphora of the Leagros Group in the British Museum (*ABV*, p. 373, no. 173; Brommer, p. 277, A6). Both these geographical depictions are more specific than the wavy line on the Kavalla fragments.

¹² The format of two figural registers, not common on the globular pyxis with upright handles (although it is, on the head-pyxis), may have been borrowed from the column-krater, such as the one in Kavalla. The similarity in format between that vase and the Demeter sherd is strong, although they are very dissimilar in style. For discussion of the style and workmanship of the Kavalla vase, see Johnston, *op. cit.* (footnote 10 above), p. 184.

¹³ The Attic black-figured examples are listed in Brommer, pp. 277–278. Some of the examples listed in subsequent sections of "Gorgo ohne Perseus" or "Perseus ohne Gorgo" represent, however synoptically or fragmentarily, the flight after the killing of Medusa: for example, the Nettos Painter's bowl in Berlin preserving Athena and Perseus (p. 280, A2) and the British Museum lekythos with Perseus, Athena, and Hermes (p. 280, A4).

¹⁴ Louvre CA 2588, unattributed; Brommer, p. 278, A20.

¹⁵ Cab. Méd. 277, unattributed; Brommer, p. 277, A18.

¹⁶ British Museum 1912.10–22.1, unattributed; Brommer, p. 280, A4.

short cloak; Perseus without a cloak carries the *kibisis* behind his back; in all other details they are virtually interchangeable.

A few Attic vases, with limited fields for decoration, show only a few of the characters, as on the Psiax cup or the Nearchos aryballos.¹⁷ On an amphora by the Nikoxenos Painter, the running-frieze scheme is compressed into a three-figure group appropriate for the field.¹⁸ Yet even a Boiotian tripod-pyxis preserves the left-to-right scheme, with Perseus on one leg of the pyxis, the running Gorgon sisters and the dying Medusa on the other two.¹⁹

The fragmentary Perseus on the Demeter sherd is by the handle; there appear to be the remains of a second running figure at the left break with additional space presumed beyond it. Therefore, one might suggest a reconstruction of a chase scene including one or two Gorgons, possibly with one or two gods intervening between the hero and his enemies. There are a few Attic vases on which the gods appear at the end, the left side of the composition, most notably on the famous dinos by the Gorgon Painter.²⁰ But it is unlikely that such was the format on our sherd, for the figure overlapping Perseus' rear leg is more probably a god than a demon. If the shape is correctly restored as a globular pyxis with upright handles, creating two separate pictures in the one register, one might have Perseus followed by Athena and Hermes on one side, Gorgons and a dying Medusa on the other.²¹

There is one very notable difference between the few Corinthian and the many Attic black-figured representations of Perseus. In the Attic, he appears always dressed in chitoniskos, cap, winged sandals, often with cloak or animal skin or both. He is often bearded. The two certain Corinthian representations of Perseus, on the Berlin krater and the fragment

¹⁷ Psiax cup; *ABV*, p. 294, no. 22, Leningrad; Brommer A12, most recently illustrated in J. Boardman, *Athenian Black Figure Vases*, Oxford 1974, fig. 170, and K. Schefold, *Götter- und Heldensagen der Griechen in der spätarchaischen Kunst*, Munich 1978, figs. 98 and 99: a) Hermes, b) Perseus. Nearchos aryballos: *ABV*, p. 83, no. 4, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 26.49; Brommer A16: Hermes and Perseus on either side of the handle.

¹⁸ Munich neck-amphora 1554, *ABV*, p. 392, no. 10; Brommer A4. This shows the moment after the killing, with Medusa collapsing in the center, Athena at the left, Perseus at the right, beginning to run off. There are no pursuing Gorgons; Aineas and Anchises appear on the reverse.

¹⁹ Berlin F 1727; Brommer, p. 281, C1; Group of the Boeotian Dancers (*ABV*, p. 29, no. 1). Illustrated in *CVA*, Berlin 4 [Germany 33], 197 [1623]:5-7.

²⁰ Louvre dinos E874; *ABV*, p. 8, no. 1; Brommer A15.

²¹ I stress that this reconstruction is very hypothetical, depending upon the interpretation of the remains at the left break of the fragment. But if it is correct, there may be some differences with the Kavalla krater. There, at the left of the larger preserved fragment, there is a figure in a patterned dress, not one of the Gorgons. Johnston (*op. cit.* [footnote 10 above]) read the incomplete dipinto to the right of that figure as ΠΟΡΟ . . . , suggesting that it might be a bystander with the same name (Πόρομος) that was given to a figure on an Attic hydria with the same scene (Vienna 3614, *ABV*, p. 106; Brommer A13). Lorber (*op. cit.* [footnote 4 above]), unaware of Johnston's reading, suggested ΓΟΠΓ . . . , noting that the first gamma was written as a pi. If Johnston's interpretation is correct, the vases would show influence from one ceramic center upon the other, although in which direction the influence went and where it would have taken place, like Johnston, I do not know. There is not much Attic black figure in Corinth datable to the first half of the 6th century; the main period of importing that fabric is in the later 6th and early 5th centuries.

As an alternative, the left-hand figure on the Kavalla fragment could be, as Amyx suggested to me, a deity (Athena?); the dipinto to its right would refer to the next figure, one of the Gorgons, not to the left figure. If that is a correct interpretation (and it seems more probable), the sequence of figures is more similar to that on the Gorgon Painter's dinos, the gods thus appearing on the left side of the scene. The Kavalla krater and the Demeter sherd would therefore differ in the presentation of the characters, for the latter is more likely to have had a deity next to Perseus (see above).

from the Demeter Sanctuary, show him nude; the figure on the Aigina kotyle, possibly Perseus, also lacks clothing.²² This difference can be underscored by comparing two very similar representations: our sherd from the Sanctuary and the fragment by Kleitias in Moscow, with the name in similar position.²³

Despite the differences in dress, our sherd and the Kavalla krater seem to point to compositions of Perseus' flight generally similar in both Corinthian and Attic black figure. In the description by Hesiod in the *Shield of Herakles*, Perseus raced swift as thought, pursued by the Gorgons.²⁴ Similarly, on the Chest of Kypselos:

αἱ δὲ ἀδελφαὶ Μεδούσης ἔχουσαι πτερὰ πετόμενον Περσέα εἰσὶ διώκουσαι· τὸ δὲ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τῷ Περσεῖ γέγραπται μόνω.²⁵

This description comes at the end of a register; immediately thereafter the discussion of the third space with military scenes begins (ἐπὶ τῇ τρίτῃ χώρᾳ τῆς λάρνακος).²⁶ The notation of Perseus' name is not necessarily significant; Pausanias noted that most of the figures were so identified.

The date of the Chest of Kypselos is not sure. Older literature assumed a date in the reign of Kypselos himself; more recent discussion postulates a date in the first half of the 6th century, by comparison of the presumed technique of the Chest and the stories shown on it with extant ivory inlay fragments found at Delphi, dated to the second quarter of the 6th century.²⁷ The latter, however, do not necessarily date the former work. The lost Chest and the similar extant work in Delphi may be but two of many such elaborate offerings in public places available as common sources for vase painters in the Archaic period. Moreover, Kypselos may have favored both Delphi and Olympia with gifts during his reign: the Chest at the latter site, the Corinthian Treasury at the former.²⁸

The correlation between these different sources, literary (Hesiod) and visual (Chest of Kypselos), suggests an early establishment of the scene in vase painting, for the famous Eleusis amphora already has most of the elements of the pursuit.²⁹ The inclusion of Athena,

²² Such may be a 7th-century characteristic, for on the famous Eleusis amphora he also appears to be without clothing, except for the winged boots. Yet, on the Thermon metope, Perseus is dressed in the short tunic, without cloak or skin.

²³ *ABV*, p. 77, no. 2; Brommer A17, most recently published by D. von Bothmer, "A New Kleitias Fragment from Egypt," *AntK* 24, 1981, pp. 66–67, pl. 10:2. On this fragment, on the C Painter's representations, and on several later examples, Perseus wears an animal skin (panther?) which has, so far as I can determine, no basis in the story. There could be any number of reasons for its use, perhaps most obviously because of a perceived similarity with Herakles. Both were aided by Hermes and Athena and of course were related. Alternatively, it may be purely decorative; compare the oinochoe by the Amasis Painter, London B 471 (*ABV*, p. 153, no. 32; Brommer, p. 274, A1), most recently illustrated in Schefold, *op. cit.* (footnote 17 above), fig. 95, where Medusa also wears an animal skin.

²⁴ Hesiod, *The Shield of Herakles*, 217–239.

²⁵ Pausanias, v.18.5.

²⁶ See the conjectural reconstruction by von Massow, reproduced in K. Schefold, *Myth and Legend in Early Greek Art*, New York 1966, pp. 72–73, fig. 26.

²⁷ Both Schefold (*ibid.*) and M. Robertson (*History of Greek Art*, Cambridge 1975, p. 141) prefer the later date: "The ark may have been made for Olympia by the family of the Cypselidae who were in exile at that time, in the same way as the exiled Attic Alcmaeonidae distinguished themselves by setting up great institutions in Delphi" (Schefold, p. 74).

²⁸ See L. H. Jeffery, *Archaic Greece*, London 1976, p. 148.

²⁹ Brommer, A7; G. Mylonas, 'Ο προτοαττικὸς Ἀμφορέυς τῆς Ἐλευσίνος, Athens 1957.

Hermes, or the collapsing Medusa, not on the Chest nor in the Hesiod description, was an addition to enlarge the story and thereby the composition on those vases where more space was available. Boardman has suggested that the popularity of the scene in the Archaic period came from the decorative quality of the running Gorgons;³⁰ in addition, the composition is very suitable as a frieze filler.

Yalouris postulated an early poem by the Corinthian Eumelos about Perseus,³¹ to account for the few early representations in Corinth and Corinthian-dominated areas. Even so, the story was never depicted extensively, for Corinthian pot painters were never as inclined to pictorialize myth or poetry as were Attic artists. It is impossible to prove a Corinthian origin for artistic representations of the scene, for the Eleusis amphora must predate the Chest of Kypselos.

The fragment from the Demeter Sanctuary is very important, despite its small size and uninspired drawing. Although sadly incomplete, it does give us an excerpt from a rare scene of a hero whose home was in the Argolid; and the winged Pegasos, one result of slaying the Medusa, was an important figure in the mythology of Ancient Corinth.

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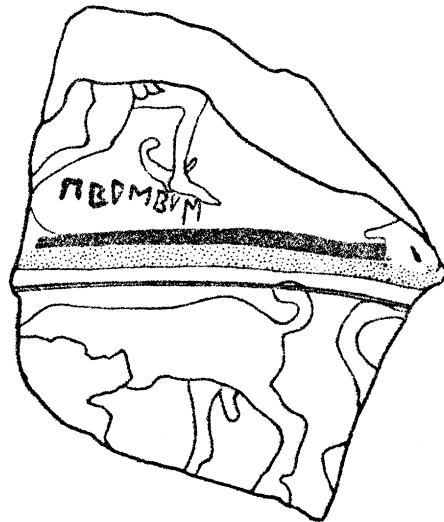
³⁰ Boardman, *op. cit.* (footnote 17 above), p. 226.

³¹ N. Yalouris, "Πτέροντα πέδιλα," *BCH* 77, 1953, pp. 293–321, esp. p. 320. The appearance of the winged Perseus rather suddenly in the later 7th century in different parts of Greece is explained by Yalouris thus: ". . . par l'influence d'un épos qui a pu répandre avec plus de célérité qu'une oeuvre d'art." Von Steuben argues that the composition of the flight was first established in Corinth, taken to Athens where it was further developed and ". . . seit dem Nessos-Maler gehört die korinthische Bildform auch zum festen Bestand der attischen Malerei" (p. 16).

It may be noted that the form of the wing on our Demeter Sanctuary Perseus, curving back from the heel, conforms to Yalouris' Ionian form of wing, used in Peloponnesian representations.



a. C-65-519



b. Drawing of C-65-519 (D. Peck)