

THE ROVER'S RETURN A LITERARY QUOTATION ON A POT IN CORINTH

ABSTRACT

An extended graffito on a Hellenistic kantharos at Corinth seems to express a topos of greeting, quite likely in the form of a classic quotation from Euripides, just as we might quote Shakespeare today, whether or not we know the formal origin of the expression. The graffito forms another item of evidence for the currency of theater among many sections of Hellenistic society, not least in the context of the symposium.

A recent observation by Jean Bousquet that a young stonemason practicing his letters at Delphi sometime near the beginning of the 3rd century B.C. used lines of Euripides as his text should prompt us to be alert for other examples outside literary sources.¹ After all, we are told, all the world's a stage.

Another likely example indeed occurs on a kantharos from Corinth, already described by Oscar Broneer as “probably a quotation from a play.”² The vase is a kantharos of the so-called articulated type with ledged vertical handles (Fig. 1); it was found in a fill beneath the stairs of Shop I of the South Stoa.³ Its date is not as evident as one might have hoped. More recent research has suggested that G. R. Edwards's chronology for this material, proposed in *Corinth* VII, iii, was too high.⁴ The construction of the South Stoa is now placed at the end of the 4th century, and the deposit in which the vase was found represents a dumped fill dating from the Early Hellenistic period to 146 B.C. On stylistic grounds, the kantharos certainly dates to the 3rd century, but without a full profile it is difficult to say even whether it belongs to the earlier or later part, although our impression is that it should not be dated as early as the first quarter. As we shall see, the style of the script of the inscription would also suggest a date markedly after the beginning of the century.

The script is a well-formed rounded capital, reminiscent of a typical formal hand of the earlier Ptolemaic period. The text gives eleven letters of the alphabet: the alpha is made with a narrow left-hand loop, which tends to reduce, as in some book scripts, to a simple diagonal; the delta is quite small, the epsilon rounded, with its horizontal slightly detached, and the sigma is also rounded; the clearer specimen of the two pi's shows neatly

1. Bousquet 1992. We are grateful to Nancy Bookidis for providing photographs and for permission to include them here, as well as to P. E. Easterling, Mark Landon, Elizabeth Pemberton, and Joyce Reynolds for a number of helpful suggestions and observations. Our thanks also to the anonymous referees of *Hesperia* for their comments.

2. *Corinth* I, iv, p. 64. Kantharos C-34-397. Diam. lip 0.114 m. Broneer 1935, pp. 71–72, fig. 15b (photographs of sides A and B); *Corinth* I, iv, pp. 63–64, fig. 41 (drawing of decoration from above); *Corinth* VII, iii, pp. 85–86, no. 489, pls. 39, 42 (drawing of inscription; the shape not illustrated).

3. On such kantharoi and their sequence, see *Corinth* XVIII, i, pp. 34–36. The deposit is *Corinth* VII, iii, pp. 224–225, no. 94, which is now referred to as Corinth Fill 1934-1.

4. *Corinth* XVIII, i, p. 3.



Figure 1. Inscribed kantharos from Corinth, C-34-397. Sides A and B. Courtesy Corinth Museum

curved verticals; the rho and phi are tall, projecting slightly above and below the bilinear norm, and with flattened curved parts (the bow of the rho is tiny⁵); the omega is almost cursive, with a double flattish curve. For parallels from around the middle of the 3rd century, one can mention *PLit. Lond.* 73, a fragment of a copy of Euripides, *Hippolytus*, together with a comparable hand in a contemporary letter, *PCair. Zen.* 57578, not before 261 B.C.⁶ It is easy to quote good later examples, such as the well-known and well-illustrated Paris papyrus of Menander, *Sikyonioidi*, assigned to the last third of the 3rd century B.C. (and most probably to near the end of it).⁷ On the other hand, projecting backward to a date as early as the end of the 4th century (the date of the earliest material in the deposit) for script of this style would be, palaeographically speaking, a leap into the dark. Indeed, it is a move one would much rather not make on the evidence of

5. The rho also needs some skill to incise, not least in the medium of fired clay: *τουτι τὸ ῥῶ μοχθηρόν*, "Tough, this rho," cries Mnesilochos when playing the role of Palamedes writing on wood, *Ar. Thesm.* 781 (411 B.C.).

6. These two are respectively nos. 3a and 3b in Roberts 1955.

7. *PSorb.* inv. 2272-3 + 72, from Ghoran. Blanchard and Bataille 1965; Turner 1987, no. 40.

the writing of the papyri that survive from this period.⁸ There is, however, cause to welcome a date in the 3rd century for the vase, and to welcome this specimen of script, small though it is, to its due place in the palaeographical handbooks.⁹

This competent performance shown in the lettering is consistent with the nature of the text, which has the pattern of a half-line of iambic trimeter verse:

ὦ παρ' ἐλπίδας φανείς

Hail to you, coming here beyond our hopes!

The other inscriptions on the kantharoi from the same or similar contexts are, as Broneer remarked, names of divinities or personified abstractions of the kind that might be invoked at drinking parties: for example, Διὸς σωτήρος, Εἰράνας, Φιλίας.¹⁰ This special cup, one imagines, was intended for a party given to celebrate someone's return from a long exile, say, or a distant journey, perhaps as a mercenary soldier. For the origin of the text, an interesting speculation offers itself from Menander. But there is something else to notice first.

Broneer's diagnosis that our half-line comes from a play can be reinforced by parallels that show that its tone is elevated above the level of ordinary everyday discourse, as is the emotion it seeks to express. A good example is Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 1445–1446, in anapaestic dimeters, where Philoctetes responds to the appearance of Herakles with the words ὦ φθέγμα ποθεινὸν ἐμοὶ πέμψας χρόνιός τε φανείς; another can be found in Electra's words to Orestes at Euripides, *Electra* 578 and following: ὦ χρόνω φανείς, ἔχω σ' ἀέλπτως.... In a Hellenistic lyric, Helen, once rescued and now abandoned by Menelaus, begins her lament with ὦ φανείς χάρμα μοι, "You once came to me, my delight."¹¹ παρ' ἐλπίδα is found at a level of high style in tragedy, as at Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 899 and Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 882, and παρ' ἐλπίδας in a lyric passage of comedy at Aristophanes, *Peace* 794.

And Menander? ὦ ποθοῦμενος φανείς, cries the heroine of the play, Krateia, to her long-separated father in *Misoumenos* (214 Sandbach/615 Arnott), continuing with ὁρῶ σ' ὃν οὐκ ἂν ῥόμην ἰδεῖν ἔτι, "I see you though I would never have thought to see you more." Significantly, this is

8. As recently discussed by Maehler (2001, pp. 50–57).

9. In *Corinth* VII, iii, p. 83, Edwards says that the inscription was incised before firing. The cursive style of the script implies that the incision of the letters was not intrinsically difficult, but Elizabeth Pemberton, Nancy Bookidis, and Ian McPhee put in a great deal of effort on our behalf to determine whether it was done before or after firing. Some chipping of the glaze is evident under a microscope, so, if incised before firing, it would have to

have been when the glaze/slip was well dried (as one might in any case assume); even the horizontal grooves of the decoration, presumably created on the wheel before firing, show some chipping. They report that there is also one inscription (C-50-24, *Corinth* VII, iii, no. 452) with pink (*milto*) in the letters, which must originate before firing, but no other example like this exists at Corinth.

10. Broneer in *Corinth* I, iv, p. 64. For a recent collection of references on γραμματικὰ ἐκπώματα, see Arnott

1996, pp. 761–762 (on fr. 272). The genitive ("of the toast") is usual in such expressions: see Arnott 1996, pp. 181–183 (on fr. 59). He omits the important reference to *Corinth* VII, iii, pp. 64–66 and p. 245, Index I. The design of this vase (with floral decoration on one side only), and others like it, implies that they were planned from the start with this purpose in mind, with the lip zone on the front left blank for the appropriate message.

11. Powell 1925, p. 186, no. 6, line 1.

again in the high style that Menander occasionally produces at moments of peak emotion, as in this recognition scene, and (very prominently) in the one at *Perikeiromene* 349–394.¹²

The question that presents itself, given the evidence of the kantharos from Corinth, is whether its half-line and Menander's are independent creations, or whether the two are related. If the two are related, a tenable and quite probable relationship would be that the half-line inscribed on the kantharos is from Euripides, recalled as a classic quotation by the person who inscribed or commissioned it, and by Menander (who must have expected his audience to be familiar with it). In each case, the effect is to make a memorable situation of the stage a paradigm for one from the world of everyday life, whether real or fictional. This, we think, is a genuine and interesting possibility.

We might have left it at that, but for encouragement from colleagues¹³ to remark on two other passages of related interest, which seem to be consistent with the possibility we raise. At Menander, *Sikyonioi* 280–311, a broken fragment of the Paris papyrus gives part of a recognition scene resembling the one quoted above from *Perikeiromene*. Judging from the remains, it has strict meter, and language appropriate to tragedy.¹⁴ Some verbal manifestations of the "Rover's Return" motif are also very striking: at 286, ἴδη καὐτός· ἐμβλέπω σε, παῖ, "I see you face to face, my child" (compare *Misoumenos*, as quoted above); at 287, ὡς παρ' ἐλπίδας; at 293, the corresponding verb ἴ ἐλπίσασά τε; and at 300, ἴας φανείς. Though the broken text would accommodate παρ' ἐλπίδας φανείς at 287–288 and/or at 300, there is no way to tell that it did, and short of further discovery one must be content, with Belardinelli, to note parallels in similarly emotional contexts in drama, including one from New Comedy in Latin at Plautus, *Poenulus* 1259–1260: *salve, insperate nobis pater, te complecti nos sine*; as Belardinelli remarks, interestingly, her one prose parallel, from Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 10.13.1, is also from a recognition scene.¹⁵

Euripides remains hard to pin down. Another text that points in his direction, suggestively perhaps, but with no proof, are the words of a commentator elucidating the lyric lines of *Phoenissae* 310–311: ἰὼ ἰὼ, μὀλις φανείς ἄελπτα καδὀκητα ματρὸς ὠλέναις. Jocasta is greeting the exiled Polynices; Schwartz gives the words of the scholiast as follows: ἄελπτα καδὀκητα· ὦ παρ' ἐλπίδα φανείς καὶ ἀπροσδοκῆτως εἰς τὰς ἐμὰς χεῖρας, "O you who have come to my arms against hope and unexpectedly"; the form παρ' ἐλπίδας appears in the scholia given by Dindorf but not by Schwartz.¹⁶ While it would hardly be difficult for a commentator on tragic poetry to have arrived without prompting at his vocative ὦ and his clarification of ἄελπτα ("unhoped"), it remains to be considered that he may have drawn, consciously or not, on a phrase made memorable by a key context of his author in which it was once uttered.

This is not the place to pursue these issues further, although we may note, on the one hand, the well-known observation attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium comparing Menander's imitation of life and life's use of Menander;¹⁷ and, on the other, the demonstrable way in which, already in the third quarter of the 4th century, well-known situations from the tragic theater were being used as points of reference by the people of Taranto at moments of crisis in their personal lives.¹⁸

12. Lines 779–824 Sandbach, whose discussion in Gomme and Sandbach 1973 is essential further reading on this topic. For other references, see Levrini 1990, p. 87, ns. 1–2.

13. Notably by an anonymous referee for *Hesperia*.

14. See, among others, Gomme and Sandbach 1973, p. 661.

15. Belardinelli 1994.

16. Schwartz 1887–1891; Dindorf 1863.

17. Syrianus, in *Hermogenem* 2.23, quoted universally, and not least in Koerte and Thierfelder 1959, p. 7, test. 32; Ar. Byz. T. 7 Slater.

18. Green 1996 and 1999.

The apprentice stonemason with whom we began this article must have thought Euripides an appropriate text to use, and one might guess that he thought inscriptions were items of some importance, so that even when practicing, he automatically sought to use a text of standing, something beyond his everyday experience. His choice also reflects the popularity of tragedy, and knowledge of it by an ordinary workman at this period. "It is perhaps mildly amusing, but certainly not ridiculous, to find a charcoal-burner quoting myth as seen in tragedy as part of his case in an argument with a shepherd."¹⁹

19. Handley 1965, p. 6, on Men. *Epit.* 149–157/325–333 Sandbach.

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J. Richard Green

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
SCHOOL OF ARCHAEOLOGY
SYDNEY, NSW 2006
AUSTRALIA

richard.green@archaeology.usyd.edu.au

Eric W. Handley

TRINITY COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE CB2 1TQ
UNITED KINGDOM