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## NOTE ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE FICORONI CISTA

IT is a curious fact that in the many attempts to interpret the Ficoroni cista<sup>1</sup> (fig. 13), its eminently classical and symmetrical frieze has been split up into units lacking the slightest artistic value. The most extreme example of this antiquarian approach to a work of art is the isolation of the five figures in or in front of the Argo into a little group utterly devoid of even the rudiments of composition.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, if one starts at the acknowledged center of the scene, the tree to which Polydeukes is tying Amykos, and moves an exactly equal distance to left and right, it is clear that one is confronted by a central group flanked by lateral units which together form one panoramic scene. Thus the central group is composed of the two contestants framed on either side by a standing and a seated figure. This balanced, closed composition is emphasized by the outer figures on either side of the group who stand with their backs toward the spectator. These figures seen from the rear are the first of three major vertical units which constitute the lateral groups on either side of the central scene. The fact that these lateral groups balance each other in general mass rather than in exact duplication of form, that is, that the introduction of the Argo modifies the strict symmetry of the right, enriches and varies this basic scheme without essentially altering it. So, too, each of the lateral groups is terminated in its upper corner by seated or reclining figures which form a curve facing away from the center.

One might describe this rich and varied composition at length. However, the preceding general analysis is sufficient to indicate that four-fifths of the frieze of the Ficoroni cista is occupied by one panoramic scene in which the major incident, the triumph over Amykos, is flanked by scenes alluding to the landing of the Argo (the action which evoked the main incident) and the use of the spring (the action attendant upon the main incident). The remaining fifth of the frieze is filled by a small, again, highly symmetrical scene serving as a kind of coda or epilogue to the large panorama. Here, a Silenus under a tree is flanked by two standing figures which, together with their accessories (the punching bag and the waterspout), form the usual balanced, closed composition. A valuable check on the probable correctness of this compositional analysis lies in the mathematical precision with which the frieze appears to have been assembled. The distance between the center of the tree and the right and left margins of the main scene, that is, up to the elbow of the punching figure on the right and to the spear of the drinking figure at the left, is identical. Similarly, the distance from the center of the tree to the crossed outer foot of the bearded hero standing to the right of the central group is precisely the same as that

<sup>1</sup> Rome, Villa Giulia, No. 24787 (K); della Seta, *Museo di Villa Giulia*, pp. 481 ff., Helbig-Amelung ii, 303 ff., No. 1752. A complete bibliography for the cista is not given in either of these references. However, by combining the references cited in these catalogues with the extensive older discussions quoted by Otto Jahn, *Die Ficoronische Cista*, Leipzig, 1852, and the later articles indicated by G. Q. Giglioli, *L'arte etrusca*, Milan, 1935, p. 52, and including the summary given by Inez Scott Ryberg, *An Archaeological Record of Rome (Studies and Documents xiii, Pt. I)*, Philadelphia, 1940, pp. 108-113, a fairly complete bibliography may be obtained.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Robert, *Archaeologische Hermeneutik*, Berlin, 1919, pp. 105-116.

to the solidly planted outer foot of the youth seen from the rear at the left (both of these figures serve as transitions between the central and lateral groups and, therefore, each appears to be in two groups). And, again, these distances are exactly the same as those from the foot of the bearded hero to the elbow of the punching youth on the right and from the foot of the youth with his back to us to the vertical spear on the left. In other words, the panoramic scene is made up of four exactly equal compositional parts, of which the two central parts unite to form the main group while the outer units constitute the flanks. And each of these four units is, again, exactly equal to the fifth unit, the little epilogue centered about the satyr. This clear division into equal parts which are then combined into a rhythmical, musical composition can hardly be accidental.

Furthermore, once the frieze of the Ficoroni cista is seen to be largely composed of one panoramic scene, its interpretation is infinitely simplified. Indeed, formal analysis and interpretation stimulate and reinforce each other to a remarkable degree. Although the majority of figures on the cista have been interpreted in the most diverse ways, there is general agreement about a few.<sup>3</sup> The protagonists, Polydeukes and Amykos, Nike, Athena, and the winged daimon recognized either as Boreas or, more correctly, Sosthenes,<sup>4</sup> are among this fortunate number. For the most part, the husky bearded figure seated to the left of Polydeukes and in front of the daimon has been accepted as Mygdon, Amykos' brother, and looked upon as a Bebrycian counterpart to the seated Hellenic spectator witnessing the contest from the opposite side. This identification seems reasonable, given the obvious balance of opposing elements in this central group and the additional marked similarity between Mygdon and Amykos. Apart from Polydeukes' little slave, all the other figures on the cista have been labelled with conflicting and controversial names. Yet, once one accepts the present compositional division, a new and very tempting approach to the seemingly hopeless task of disentangling these Argonauts presents itself.

Once the divine or barbarian figures in the main scene have been subtracted, that is, once Athena, Nike, Sosthenes, Amykos, Mygdon and, in addition, the little slave have been eliminated, there remain twelve figures. And according to Pindar,<sup>5</sup> it was precisely twelve heroes who set forth on the great adventure. In this case, the favorite classical number of twelve consists of the following heroes listed in the poet's order: Herakles, Kastor and Polydeukes, all three, sons of Zeus; Euphemos and Periklymenos, the sons of Poseidon; Orpheus, Apollo's son, Echion and Erytos, sons of Hermes; Zetes and Kalais, the Boreades. These ten came to accompany Jason, in addition to the seer, Mopsos. When we recall the quantities of heroes who accompanied Jason according to the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic versions and the fact that the Ficoroni cista, as it is generally agreed, reflects a considerably earlier iconographic and artistic tradition than its late fourth- or early third-century date

<sup>3</sup> In this brief note, I shall not quote the various alternatives which have been suggested for each figure. They may be found in the bibliography quoted in note 1, and, especially, in Jahn, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> First suggested by Panofka, *Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Sitzungsberichte*, 1851, pp. 114 ff. According to Ioannes Malalas, *Chronikon* iv, p. 78, a bulky winged figure appeared to the Argonauts and prophesied their victory over Amykos. They called this local, Bebrycian daimon, Sosthenes. This theory was accepted by Jahn, Helbig-Amelung, etc. See, too, the brief article by E. Maass, "Boreas und Michael," *JOAI*, xiii, 1910, pp. 117-122.

<sup>5</sup> *Pythian Odes* iv, 301 ff.

implies,<sup>6</sup> this coincidence becomes of particular interest. The occurrence of a band of twelve Argonauts in these two instances suggests that the fourth *Pythian Ode* and the cista reflect a common tradition. If so, it is reasonable to suppose that one may be helpful in interpreting the other. Let us see.

The most easily identified of the Argonauts is, of course, Polydeukes shown in the unmistakable act of binding Amykos to a tree. The bearded figure standing to the right of Athena has frequently been called Herakles. Given the fact that he is the only bearded Argonaut on the cista, and that Herakles was already a mature and celebrated hero when he joined in the quest, this identification is probably correct. The youth seated beside him has most often been called Jason for no reason save that he occupies so important a position. If the entire frieze is split up into small units, as it customarily has been, there is no way of including the leader of the Argonauts in the main scene unless he is identified with this youth. Once it is recognized that we are looking at a large, panoramic scene, this problem ceases to exist. Furthermore, this laurel-crowned youth whose feet are protected by shoes and who is adorned by an armband in no way suggests the hardy hero. On the contrary, his appearance is well-suited to Orpheus whose rank among the Argonauts is attested by the fact that Apollonios Rhodios lists him as the very first of his far larger company.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the dreamy youth seated in the upper left corner of the scene is not a mountain god, as his elevated position has induced many to think, but the seer Mopsos, from whose hand the priestly fillets flutter.<sup>8</sup> As for Jason, he is most likely to be recognized in the prominent figure to the left of the main group who leans on his raised left leg and wears a pointed cap or helmet. He is the only figure differentiated in this fashion, and the fact that he wears the familiar cap so often seen on Odysseus, again suggests his rôle as captain of the ship.<sup>9</sup> The last figure of Pindar's twelve whom we should expect to find without too much difficulty is Kastor. One other hero is particularly prominent on the cista — the stalwart figure seated on the Argo who watches the main scene so intently. Who else can this be but Kastor? The fact that like his twin brother Polydeukes, he has the now familiar downy beard on his face suggests that this identification is correct, especially since, as we shall see, both of the Dioskouroi are characterized by this beard in the little epilogue scene.

The remainder of Pindar's Argonauts, the sons of Poseidon, of Hermes, and of Boreas cannot be identified with any reasonable degree of certainty. Inasmuch as the Boreades are represented wingless and seated on the Argo in the well-known

<sup>6</sup> The dates most generally accepted for the cista. For discussion of the stylistic problems involved in the cista see, for example, F. Behn, *Die Ficoronische Cista*, Leipzig, 1907; E. Feihl, *Die Ficoronische Cista und Polygnot*, Tübingen, 1913, and the summary in Ryberg, *loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Argonautica* i, 23. For the earlier identifications of this figure, including a similar one as Orpheus, see Jahn, *op. cit.*, p. 10 f. Orpheus wears a crown of laurel on the famous krater in Berlin published by Furtwängler, 50. *Berliner Winckelmannsprogramm*, pl. 2. If the object in Orpheus' right hand were a spear, one would expect the lower part of the spearhead to be indicated below Nike's legs, given the height of this member on the other spears represented on the cista. Perhaps this is the golden  $\acute{\alpha}\omicron\pi$  which characterizes Orpheus in Pindar, *Fragment* 139,9.

<sup>8</sup> Robert, *loc. cit.*, recognized that this figure could not be a mountain god. However, his suggestion that the taenia indicate that the youth is the "liebling" of one of the heroes is hardly more convincing!

<sup>9</sup> This figure has frequently been called Kastor. Jahn, *loc. cit.*, very wisely rejected this suggestion. For the iconography of the Dioskouroi, including the presence or absence of the pilos, see above note 32.

Talos vase,<sup>10</sup> one might be tempted to consider that the two youths on shipboard are the most likely candidates among the remaining unidentified figures for Zetes and Kalais. And given the importance of Euphemos, especially in Pindar's account, one might suggest that he is the hero represented on such close terms with Jason, and that his brother, Periklymenos, stands directly behind the leader. By this process of elimination, the two youths in front of the Argo, one coming down the ladder, the other seated on the shore, would be Echion and Erytos, the sons of Hermes. However, the individual identifications of these six figures are highly tentative, the main point being that the six remaining figures on the cista are in some way equivalent to the remainder of Pindar's heroes.

Whether or not the specific identifications suggested here prove acceptable, the basic analogy between Pindar's twelve Argonauts and the twelve heroes in the panoramic scene on the cista remains undeniable. It certainly offers a far more tangible and reasonable approach to the problem than the longer accounts of the journey. In any case, it affords striking confirmation of the correctness of dividing the cista's frieze into one long panoramic scene and a short tailpiece.

A word about this tailpiece. To the left, a young man punches the κώρυκος. This action, customary among Greek boxers practising for a contest,<sup>11</sup> can scarcely indicate any other Argonaut than Polydeukes. A comparison of the two figures of the hero shown on the cista emphasizes the correctness of this assumption, for they are identical, downy beard and all.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Valerius Flaccus must have been familiar with some such scene when he wrote:

"The hero of Sparta wears thongs of bull's hide studded with wounding lead, that to the empty airs at least he may deal his random blows, and that the Pagasean ship may watch the grandson of Oebalus filling the shore with his harmless sport."<sup>13</sup>

Polydeukes' counterpart in this symmetrical scene is certainly his brother Kastor with whom he so constantly appears. Kastor, too, has the required youthful beard and is further characterized by the spear and chlamys, his familiar attributes on innumerable monuments.<sup>14</sup>

The most amusing figure of this trio is the Silenus who gaily imitates Polydeukes at the expense of his own fat stomach. The appearance of such a figure in the context

<sup>10</sup> *FR.* pls. 38–39. The iconography of the Boreades is by no means uniform in this respect, witness the fact that according to Apollonios Rhodios, *Argonautica* i, 219 ff. they have wings on their feet alone while in Hyginus, *Fabulae* xlvi (ed. H.I. Rose, Leyden, N.D., pp. 17–18), both their heads and feet are winged. Robert, too (*op. cit.* p. 113), remarks that the Boreades are frequently represented without wings.

<sup>11</sup> According to Plato, *Laws* viii, 830 A. For the κώρυκος see Gardiner, *Athletics of the Ancient World*, p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of Polydeukes' downy beard see above, pp. 6 ff., and notes 36–40. It is interesting to note that Apollonios Rhodios divides the Argonauts into three groups. The oldest heroes, those of Herakles' age, are probably bearded. The next age group, represented by Jason, Cyzikos, and Polydeukes, is characterized by the youthful downy beard. Finally, there are the νέοι, the younger comrades who, as yet, have no beard. On the cista, too, the heroes are similarly classified according to the presence or absence or degree of their beards, and will be seen to fall into precisely the same three categories.

<sup>13</sup> *Argonautica* i, 420 ff. (translation quoted from J. H. Mozley in *The Loeb Classical Library*, 1934, p. 35).

<sup>14</sup> See Chapouthier, *Les Dioscures au service d'une déesse, passim*.

of the Argonauts is of particular interest given the fact that Sophokles wrote a satyr-play, *Amykos*.<sup>15</sup> Again, on a hydria in Paris<sup>16</sup> (fig. 14), the central scene of Polydeukes' triumph over the Bebrycian king appears in a setting of dancing satyrs and maenads. Under the circumstances, it is tempting to consider that both this scene on the cista and the longer panorama on the hydria in some way reflect theatrical productions.<sup>17</sup> One is left wondering to what extent—if any—the drama influenced the iconography of the main episode of the Amykos story.

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<sup>15</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* ix, 400 B. See Robert, *Die griechische Heldensage* iii, pp. 842 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale: A. De Ridder, *Catalogue des vases peints de la Bibliothèque nationale*, Paris, 1902, pp. 334–6, No. 442. Present figure 14 taken from E. Gerhard, *AV*. iii, pls. CLIII–IV.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Gerhard, *AV*. pp. 15–19 and L. Séchan, *Études sur la tragédie grecque dans ses rapports avec la céramique*, Paris, 1926, p. 40.