

NOTE ON AN ATTIC HYDRIA ATTRIBUTED TO THE WORKSHOP OF THE MEIDIAS PAINTER

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RESUMO:

Estudo de uma hýdria (kálpis) ática de figuras vermelhas, anteriormente atribuída ao pintor de Aquiles, onde se propõe ser uma obra do pintor de Meidias ou da sua oficina, da última década do século V a. C.

Palavras-chave: Vasos áticos; Vasos de figuras vermelhas; Pintor de Meidias; Pintor de Aquiles.

ABSTRACT:

Study of an Attic red-figure hydria (kalpis), previously assigned to the Achilles Painter, which is proposed to be a work of Meidias painter or his workshop, perhaps in the last decade of the fifth century B. C.

Keywords: Attic vases; Red-figure vases; Meidias painter; Achilles painter.

Among the many collections, both public and private, of Greek vases found in Portugal, D. Manuel de Lancastre's (Lisbon) is particularly noteworthy. The collection comprises a remarkable set of Corinthian and Etrusco-Corinthian vases, Attic black- and red-figure vases as well as southern Italian red-figure pieces, which include productions from Apulia, Campania and Paestum. Considering the high quality of many of the pieces, this collection of Greek ceramics is perhaps the most important in Portugal, and has been the object of several studies in the last few years (Rocha Pereira 2007: 75-104; Morais & Centeno 2013 and 2015).

This brief essay analyses an interesting hydria (or kalpis)² (Fig. 1) bought at auction in London in 1996, whose catalogue attributed the piece to the Achilles painter.³ The identification of this master as the vase's author, also corroborated later by Rocha Pereira (2007: 95), is not convincing, since the scene depicted is far from representative of the pictorial style of the works of the Achilles painter.⁴

The hydria studied here is small in size, 123 mm in height and 73 mm at its maximum diameter. It was restored from a number of fragments and bears a red-figure scene, limited above and below by a frieze of ovules and dots. The scene (Fig. 2), partially affected by the vase's state of conservation, depicts a female figure standing to the right, in a diagonal pose, represented at three quarters leaning

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² On the form and labels, cf. Richter & Milne 1935, 11-12, where two passages from Antiphanes and Polybius are quoted, mentioning the use of the kalpis to keep perfume. Given the vase's small size, it is possible to admit a similar function. See also, Folsom 1976, 22.

³ *A Private Collection of Greek Vases and Terracotas*, London, Christie's, 3 July 1996, Lot 68.

⁴ Oakley's (1997) work remains essential to understanding the works of the Achilles painter. See also Oakley 2004, an appendix of new vases attributed to this artist.

to the left, whose head is in profile turning back, and she bears a chiton and himation that unfolds into multiple pleats; the young woman, who firmly holds the top part of the himation in her hands, keeping it thus stretched, seems to have been surprised by the “touch” of a floating Eros appearing to the right, naked,⁵ whose legs are slightly bent and wearing some type of sandals.⁶ Between the two figures, a sprigged acanthus leaf covers Eros, thus favouring the surprise effect of his appearing to the woman, who when touched on her left hand, gazes astonished and fearful at Eros. With this scene, the artist perhaps intended to gloss on the awakening of love in youth, in which Eros is depicted as a winged, naked young man, an image that becomes widespread from the end of the Archaic Period (Cohen 1997: 146), pursuing a woman, an image that becomes quite frequent from the mid-5th century B.C. (Mannack 2001: 73). Indeed, this motif would be highly appropriate to the vase’s probable function which, given its small size, would perhaps hold perfumed water, whose fragrance would be one more ingredient in concocting enchantment.⁷

As mentioned previously, attributing this vase authorship by the Achilles painter raises a number of issues and may even be highly improbable, given its style. The treatment of the clothing of impressionist traits, the profile of the faces (nose and eyes in particular), the drawing of the hands and the movement of the figures, reveals that it is a piece from the Late Classical period, (ARFV: 144-145), much more consistent with the pictorial style of the productions from the workshop of Meidias and his followers (ARV: 1312-29, 1690, 1704, 1708; *Paralipomena*: 477-79; *Beazley Addenda*: 180-82; *Beazley Addenda*²: 361-65). Meidias, one of the last great figures of Athenian vase painting (Richter 1946: 146), was one of the most important and influential painters of red-figure Attic vases at the end of the 5th century B.C. (Tugusheva 2009: 291). He was also considered the most interesting and original artist working in Athens at the time (Robertson 1992: 242) and the first vase painter to be described as Mannerist, whose style is said to be influenced by the works of Phidias (Mannack 2001: 4, 7 and 8). It is thus understandable that his work and that of his associates has been the object of numerous studies, amongst which most notably those by Hahland (1930), Becatti (1947) and, more recently, Burn (1987). About fifty vases have been attributed to Meidias but this number rises to 352, if we consider also pieces by his circle of painters.⁸

Apart from identifying the scene depicted as one of Meidias’ favourite themes (woman/Eros) (Burn 1987: 83-4), a closer look at the vase seems to confirm that it was a product of his workshop, particularly considering its composition and the manner in which the elements are placed, such as the female figure in a diagonal pose, typical of Meidias’ work (Robertson 1992: 234), inclining to the left and gazing to the right, a pose recorded on several vases attributed to this Master and his circle of artists. On the famous E224 hydria held at the British Museum (ARV: 1313.5 and 1690; *Paralipomena*: 477; *Beazley Addenda*²: 361-2; Burn 1987: M5), one of Meidias’ masterpieces, the representation of Peitho moving to the right and looking to the left, holding a veil with both hands (see photograph Burn 1987: Pl. 7a), is very revealing of the master’s influence on the artist of the vase here under study, both in terms of the female figure’s position and the technique of the drawing, visible, for example: in the accentuated curve of the leg, the prominence of the bosom, using short lines, drawn very close to each other, the two heavier strokes around the waist, as well as in the use of small, thicker semi-circular lines, set apart, to finish off some of the clothing’s pleats.⁹ There are, nonetheless, slight differences in the quality of the two figures, particularly a more refined, steadier stroke on the London piece, evident in the drawing of the face and

⁵ Part of Eros’ figure is damaged, affecting the area between his chin/nape and the top part of his legs, as well as his left arm and the better part of his wings, which cannot be seen.

⁶ Although the black painting is faded, we can still see vestiges of the drawing of the sandal on Eros’ right foot. Rocha Pereira (2007: 95) noted that Eros is only wearing a sandal on his left foot.

⁷ On the correlation between decorative motifs and the diversity of the vases’ forms, cf. Shapiro 1997 and Williams 2002 (particularly, pp. 347-49).

⁸ According to the records of the *Beazley Archive* (last consulted on 29th August 2014).

⁹ Meidias used this technique often, seen for example on some of the figures of the British Museum’s hydria E224, as on the already mentioned Peitho (Burn 1987: Pl. 7a) or Aphrodite sitting near an altar (Burn 1987: Pl. 4b).

hair, most certainly due to it being a larger vase, warranting greater care from the artist in its decoration. However, this difference is no longer perceptible when comparing the quality of the drawing of the head on the female figure on our vase with similar figures drawn by Meidias on smaller vases, such as the three dancers (especially the one on the left) on the bellied lekythos MNB 2110 at the Musée du Louvre (ARV: 1314.14; *Beazley Addenda*²: 362; Burn 1987: M16). In this piece, the manner in which the hair and face are depicted is very similar to the kalpis studied here (see photo, in Burn 1987: Pl. 16c).

The type of sandals Eros is wearing (Fig. 3) also finds echo in Meidias' work. The best example are the Erotes pulling Aphrodite's chariot (see photo, in Burn 1987: Pl. 29a; Richter 1946: Fig. 115), clearly depicted on the hydria 81947 held at Florence's Museo Archeologico Etrusco (ARV: 1312. 2 and 1690; *Paralipomena*: 477; *Beazley Addenda*²: 361; Burn 1987: M2).¹⁰

Finally, reference should be made to the vegetal element represented on the vase which separates the woman from Eros, a sprigged acanthus leaf (see Fig. 2), partially damaged, a motif that is rarely used by Meidias, particularly on large vases, appearing thriftily but with a refined, elegant stroke on small vases, such as in the case of two bellied lekythoi found at the Museo Jatta in Ruvo (ARV: 1314.16; *Paralipomena*: 477; *Beazley Addenda*²: 362; Burn 1987: M18 and Pl. 38a, 38c) and at the Cleveland County Museum of Art (Burn 1987: M20 and Pl. 12c). However, the most similar examples can be found on vases painted "in the manner of the Meidias Painter", such as the bellied lekythos E699 at the British Museum (ARV: 1324.46; Burn 1987: MM 75 and Pl. 26a, 26c) and the MNB 1330 at the Musée du Louvre (ARV: 1325.52bis; *Beazley Addenda*²: 364; Burn 1987: MM82 and Pl. 15a, 15c).¹¹

Considering what has been said above, it seems that there could be a possible connection between the vase under study and the work of Meidias or, in more general terms, his workshop. Given the evident similarities with this artist's works and following an interesting observation by Robertson (1997: 239) when analysing his work, it may also be possible that the scene depicted on our kalpis may indeed be an extract from a much more complex composition, usually painted on larger vases, such as the hydriai. It was probably quite routine for artists to use "fragments" of scenes depicted on large vessels to decorate smaller ones, or even to "practice" drawing some figures on pieces of lesser importance. An example of this practice could be the small hydria (height: 195 mm), sold by the Bonhams auction house in London in 2010,¹² described as "in the manner of the Meidias painter". The scene depicts two dancing maenads, the one on the left holding a thyrsus and a flute, and the one on the right, a tambourine (Fig. 7). This vase, although slightly larger, shows some affinities with our kalpis in the friezes of ovules and dots that frame the scene, as well as in the strokes used to paint the figures. However, we believe that the pose of the two maenads and the manner in which their hair and faces are drawn is very similar to two dancers represented on the frontal part of the lower panel of the hydria 259 at the Badisches Landesmuseum in Karlsruhe (ARV: 1315.1 and 1690; *Paralipomena*: 477; *Beazley Addenda*²: 362; CVA Germany 7, Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum 1, 28-29, Pls. 22.4; Burn 1987: C1 and Pl. 39), attributed to the Karlsruhe Paris painter, very similar to Meidias but who, for many scholars, is by the Master himself (Burn 1987: 6). The similarities found on the two hydriai may contribute to reinforcing this hypothesis.

Although it is not certain that the kalpis studied here can be attributed to Meidias, it seems clear that the piece is very similar to the works by this Master and, for this reason, it can be considered as having been produced in his workshop at the end of the 5th century B.C., perhaps during the final decade.¹³

¹⁰ For similar sandals, see Figs. 4-6 of the terracotta Eros (second half of 2nd century B.C.) found at Myrina, Dutuit Collection (Petit Palais of Paris, Dutuit Collection, Inv. ADUT01891).

¹¹ Very similar sprigged acanthus leaves were also used to decorate larger vases, such as the hydria in the Robinson collection, attributed to the Meidias workshop (CVA USA 7, Baltimore, Robinson Collection 3: 22 and Pl. XIII, 1a-c=Burn 1987: MM11?).

¹² Antiquities, (Auction 17822), London, Bonhams, 28 April 2010, Lot 182. See complete references to this piece in *Beazley Archive*, vase No. 45142.

¹³ On the chronology of Meidias' works, cf. Burn 1987: 7-8.

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Fig. 1 (Photograph by José Pessoa)

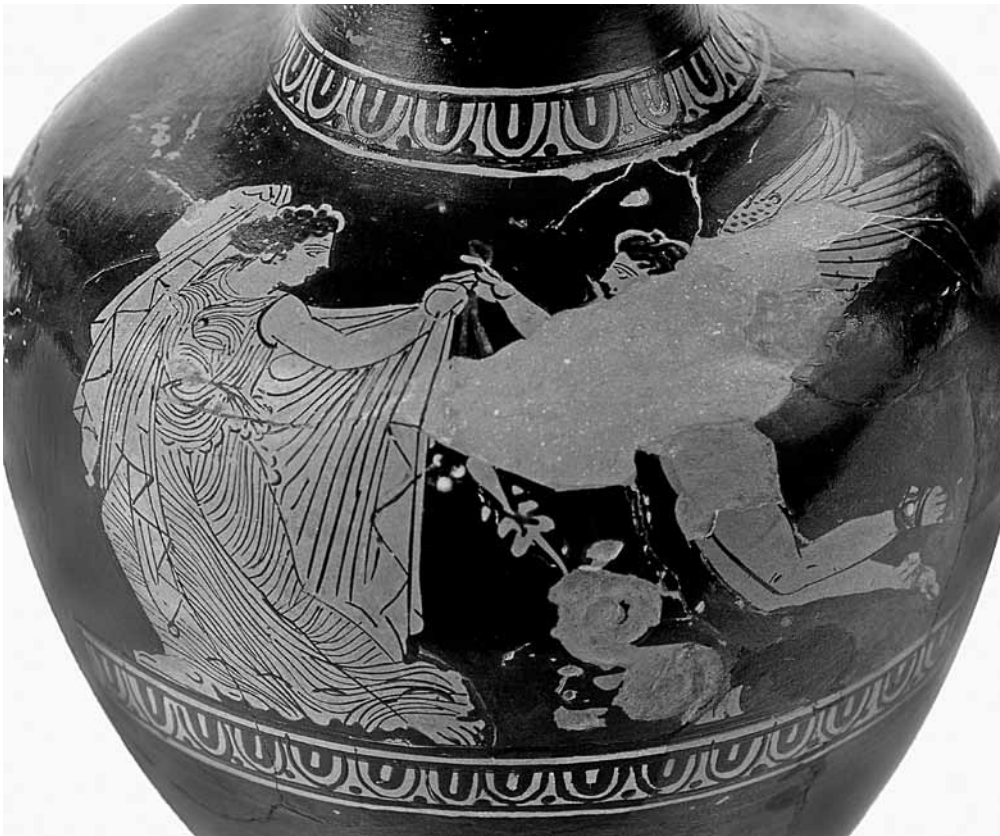


Fig. 2 (Photograph by José Pessoa)

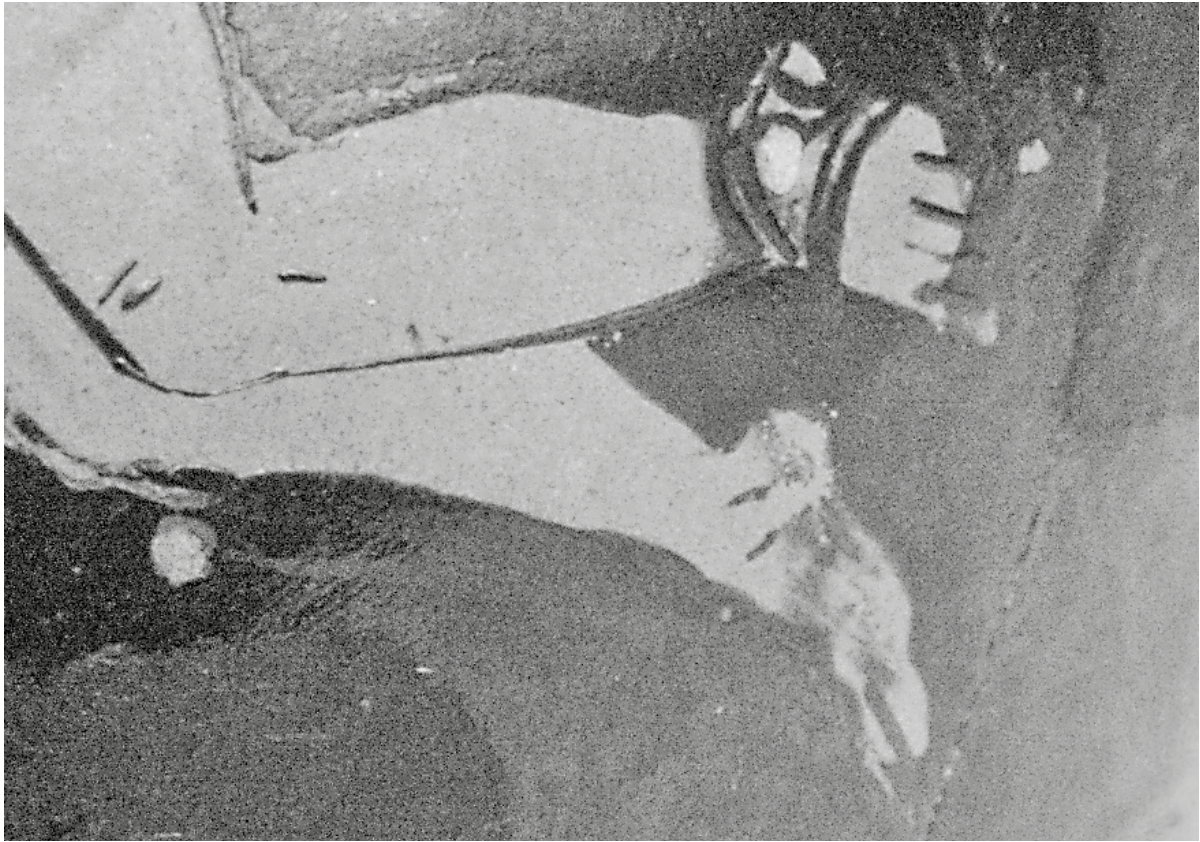


Fig. 3 (Photograph by José Pessoa)



Fig. 4 (Photograph by Rui Centeno)



Fig. 5 (Photograph by Rui Centeno)



Fig. 6 (Photograph by Rui Centeno)



Fig. 7 (Photograph: Bonhams Auction 17822, London, 28th April 2010, Lot 182)