ENKAUSTES AGALMATON

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Last May the Museum acquired an early South Italian column krater, which is published here for the first time. Its unique importance lies in the scene of the obverse (illustrated on the opposite page) which shows a “painter of statues,” an ἀγαλματίς ἔταιντος, as Plutarch expresses it, at work. In the center a towering statue of a youthful Herakles rises on a pedestal. With his left hand he holds the bow terminating in swans’ heads, his arm and shoulder covered with the lion skin. His right clasps the club, supported on a pedestal of its own. It can be said that the statue is finished, at least from the sculptor’s point of view, but the action of the bearded fellow in his felt cap makes it clear that much is wanting yet. For here is the painter busily applying paint to a portion of the lionskin, while over on the left his assistant or apprentice, a kinky-haired boy with somewhat African features, takes care of the heating apparatus so essential to the encaustic technique. A column to the left makes this an indoor scene—and the libation bowl suspended above makes it clear that the statue has already been set up in its shrine or sanctuary, with the painting left to the last, to be completed in situ. So much, at the moment, for the visible world.

But the completion of a statue was no ordinary event for the Greek artist; he felt, with justified pride that it was of interest to the gods too. Thus we have Zeus, majestic in repose, to the left above, and Nike on the same level farther to the right. These two figures are onlookers, but somewhere in the distance, like gods on the pediments of temples. The third divinity, however, Herakles himself, has descended to take a closer look. He approaches, hand on mouth, stepping softly, so as not to disturb the artist. It would be going too far to interpret his facial expression—to portray this was not the vase-painter’s intention—and besides, the model of the statue has not as yet taken a good look, and his critical appraisal is still to follow. One thing is certain, though: this is not a farce, not one of those South Italian parodies, and even the goggle eyes of Herakles are not meant to be taken as comical. This is a serious matter, and there is nothing irreverent in the proximity of statue and model, no more so than in van der Weyden’s panel of Saint Luke painting the Virgin.

For the statue and its model I can think of no Attic parallel, but there exists a similar setting on another South Italian vase in Amsterdam (see p. 160). Here Apollo is shown playing the lyre, while behind him his temple appears, with the doors of the cella open, affording us a glimpse of the cult statue: the youthful god, bow in one hand, libation bowl in the other. It is hard to say whether this statue is meant to be of bronze or stone, for the colors are those of the red-figure technique, with white added for highlights only. On the Herakles vase we can be more certain of the material. The statue is painted in white, save for the lionskin, with anatomical and other details added in diluted glaze. The statue is thus set off from the base, which was no doubt of a different kind of stone. The brilliant white at once suggests marble and this suggestion is further borne out by the fact that the statue is being painted in the encaustic technique.

This process has so far been better known.
Early South Italian column krater. The scene shows an "enkaustes agalmaton" painting a statue of Herakles, while Zeus, Nike, and Herakles look on. Early iv century B.C. This is the earliest representation of a painter using the encaustic technique. Height 20½ inches. Rogers Fund, 1950
even, as the wax could not be kept liquid; but at best soft. The second step, the ἐγχαιαν consisted of melting the applied paint by going over it with a red-hot iron rod, the ὀραίον or χαλύτης. This second step required considerable skill, and its technical name has therefore been applied to the whole process; artists painting in encaustic did not sign their works “So-and-so painted it,” but “So-and-so burned it in.”

Both phases of the encaustic technique are illustrated on our vase. The bearded artist holds the paint pot in his left hand and applies the wax paint with the cestrum. It will be observed that the instrument is not grasped in our fashion (with three fingers) but with the whole hand, in the manner of the Japanese, an attitude also observed in pictures of Attic vase-painters. While the master is thus engaged in the first step, his assistant prepares for the second. He has placed several rods in a charcoal brazier; these must be the ὀραία or χαλύτης, of which several were required in order that one might always be hot. A closed chest behind the painter completes the equipment, perhaps the arcula loculata mentioned by Varro, which contained compartments for the different wax paints.

We should, of course, like to know how much of the statue has already been painted and in what colors. In this we shall be disappointed, for the vase-painter has used the conventional colors at his disposal: the red background of the vase, the black glaze, an added white, and a diluted glaze superimposed on the white. But as the artist busies himself with the mane of Herakles’s lionskin, one may perhaps deduce that the lionskin, differentiated as it is from the rest of the statue by not being white, has already been painted and that the color now in the paint pot is a darker hue, intended for the mane. It would have been interesting to see the painter work on the flesh of the statue, if only to settle once and for all the vexing question of its coloring.

There are deliberate differences between the figure on the pedestal and the living hero. We have the impression, therefore, that this is no fictitious creation but a real work which the vase-painter has seen and vividly recalls. What
was this statue? Ancient literature does not help us here, for no mention is made of a famous statue of Herakles that can be assigned to southern Italy of the early fourth century B.C. Unexpected help, however, comes from another field, that of numismatics. From about the middle of the fourth century on, coins were struck by Herakleia, a town in Lucania, which portray on the reverse a standing Herakles not unlike the statue on this vase (see p. 156). Not only is the stance very similar but there is also a marked resemblance in the way the lionskin is draped over the left shoulder and arm and in the selection of the attributes, club and bow. Mrs. Karl Lehmann has observed the same general characteristics in a statue in Copenhagen and a statuette in Syracuse, both of which seem to go back to a lost original, illustrated in the coinage of Herakleia. Of this lost masterpiece the statue on the vase is perhaps another illustration. If the comparison holds and the coins and the vase all portray the same statue, two important facts have been gained: the prototype must have been a marble statue, rather than a bronze (as has been argued) and its date must be pushed back into the first quarter of the fourth century, the time of the

LEFT: Bronze statue of Herakles in Copenhagen. RIGHT: Marble statuette of Herakles in Syracuse
vase. The earlier date would also agree better with a sculptural feature of the statues mentioned: the decidedly Polykleitan stance.

Statues of Herakles, of course, were common in the ancient world, and naturally there is no assurance that a hypothetical cult statue of Herakleia was the only one that could have inspired a South Italian artist to paint the extraordinary scene on our vase. Nor should certain differences be overlooked. Our hero lacks baldric and quiver, and the treatment of the hair does not correspond in every detail to the very short hair on the statues in Copenhagen and Syracuse. The baldric, of course, could have been painted and was therefore not yet shown, while the quiver may have been left out inadvertently. As to the hair, it may be countered that the statues preserved are later adaptations reflecting a later taste, or, that the vase-painter here employed his own style of showing hair, instead of copying the statue exactly. But these discrepancies remain minor ones when set next to the agreeing features, and, in any event, the vase-painter may well have worked from memory, rather than in front of the cult statue itself.

Unfortunately early South Italian vase-painting has not been satisfactorily localized. Tarentum has frequently been named the place of manufacture, but this does not speak against the assumption that the statue was set up in Herakleia. For not only is the distance between the two cities relatively small—perhaps forty miles—but Tarentum was also one of the mother cities of Herakleia and must have retained close ties with its colony. Where would the worship of Herakles have been of the greatest importance if not in a city named after him?

The other side of the vase is in a quiet vein. To the right, Athena is in conversation with one of the Dioskouroi, who is either ready to leave or reporting from a journey. He is painted as a traveler, with boots, hat, two spears, and a mantle and can be identified by his brightly painted star. On a higher plane, to the left, Hermes (with hat and herald’s staff) turns away from his son Pan, who holds his pipes, to take part in the conversation. A fifth god, Eros, alone is unconcerned and continues his game of chasing a goose. The South Italian vase-painters were partial to such inconsequential groupings, but our artist has succeeded in pulling his figures together, and the poses struck by the participants are not as artificial as they elsewhere seem.

The vase is not signed, nor can it be attributed with certainty to one of the anonymous painters whose work has been assembled. In early South Italian vase-painting two chief
groups are distinguished; this vase belongs to the second, the Sisyphos Group. Its artists strove for the monumental and were influenced especially by the great sculptural compositions of the late fifth century—the art of the Parthenon and of Phigaleia. The painter of the column krater is perhaps closest to the Ariadne Painter, so named after a stamnos with Theseus deserting Ariadne, but his style, distinctive though it is, has not been recognized on other vases.

*Acc. no. 50.11.4. For the encaustic technique cf. O. Rossbach in Pauly-Wissowa, Realencyclopa-

die, vol. 5, cols. 2570 ff. On the coinage of Herakleia and the related statues see P. W. Lehmann, Statues on Coins [New York, 1946], pp. 53 ff. The fullest account of early South Italian vase-
painting is by A. D. Trendall (Frühitaliotische Vasen, Leipzig, 1938). The illustration of the Herakleia stater is taken from Mrs. Lehmann’s book (pl. xii, fig. 1); that of the Amsterdam vase from A. D. Trendall, op. cit., pl. 32, top; the illustration of the Copenhagen statue is from P. Arndt, La Glyptotheque Ny-Carlsberg, pl. lxxxix; that of the Syracuse statuette from a photograph by Alinari.*

*Scene from the other side of the vase shown on page 157, assembly of deities: Athena, one of the Dioskouroi, Hermes, Pan, and Eros*