A year ago two Etruscan black-figured neck-amphorae, presumably found together, came to the Museum and are here illustrated for the first time. The two are by the same painter and, judging by the proportions, also by the same potter. The class to which they belong goes under the conventional misnomer “Pontic,” since the archaeologist who first assembled the group thought he had identified mounted archers on such a vase with tribesmen of the Pontus Euxinus, the Black Sea. Later studies destroyed the arguments for a Pontic attribution and established clearly the Etruscan origin of the vases. Within Etruscan vase-painting they have easily the most original and certainly the gayest pictures. The fortunate acquisition of two newcomers to the group not only enriches our knowledge and appreciation of the “Pontic” class but also adds greatly to the Museum’s collection, which had heretofore contained only a small cup of this lively and characteristic group.

Both vases were made shortly after the middle of the sixth century, a time when, in Etruria as elsewhere, Attic vases had at last won out over their Corinthian competitors. Etruscan vase-painting, admittedly derivative, took much of its technique but not always its inspiration from the many Greek styles that poured into the land. The Etruscan customer was in a certain measure spoiled by these readily available Greek imports—Corinthian, Attic, Laconian, Chalcidian, and East Greek—and we are not astonished that the enterprising native vase-painters catering to the taste of their clientele freely borrowed from them. The shape of the two neck-amphorae, for example, and to a certain extent their scheme of decoration, is Attic, to be sure, but the bulging handles are a Corinthianizing feature, while the pattern work, both floral and geometric, owes much to East Greek sources. Yet the Etruscan genius for blending and assimilating these various foreign influences produces in the end an unmistakably Etruscan work, quite distinct from its Greek models.

There is much detail on the two vases that deserves special attention. As is usual on neck-amphorae of this shape, there are several pictures. The chief scenes on each vase are set in panels on the shoulders, separated from a subsidiary frieze by a broad ornamental band. On the better preserved of the vases the subjects, for all their charm, remain something of a mystery. On one side, two pairs of ladies are reclining on couches. They have taken off their shoes and hung them on conveniently placed pegs. The women nearest the spectator are shown fully, while of their companions only the heads appear. The two in front are fully dressed and have drawn their mantles over their heads. The one on the left has pulled up her knees; her arms are hidden under her dress, which is decorated with white crosses. The other has her arms free, and they are adorned with bracelets. Her right arm hangs over the headpiece of the couch, where a cloth with folds, drawn in diluted glaze, hides the pillows. In her left hand she holds a pet bird, presumably a dove. The pair on the left seem to be engaged in earnest conversation, to which the other lady’s companion is attracted. A low table, covered with a cloth, is placed under each couch. There are rushes or sprigs on the ground, some of them bolt upright, giving this scene an open-air look, while the quiet, well-behaved poses and the empty tables convey a feeling of expectation: the guests have not yet arrived and the feast has not begun.

The subject on the other side should be connected, but its meaning is not entirely clear to me. A boy dressed in a petasos, a white himation with red crosses, and pointed shoes leads a procession. His right hand is raised in a salute; in his left he holds a caduceus. He is followed by a
Etruscan black-figured neck-amphora, about 540 B.C., attributed to the Paris Painter. On each side of the neck are two panthers with their heads conjoined. On the shoulder, reclining women (obverse) and a centaur and heralds (reverse); below, a neat-herd and bulls. Gift of Nicolas Koutoulakis, 1955
Etruscan black-figured neck-amphora, about 540 B.C., attributed to the Paris Painter. On the neck, branches; on the shoulder, centaurs; below, lions. Rogers Fund, 1955. The Paris Painter takes his name from an amphora with the Judgment of Paris. For details of these vases see the following pages.
very sedate centaur, carrying an uprooted tree, whose face and forelegs are human though his ears and feet are equine. Next comes an old man dressed in a white chiton with crinkly red markings for folds and a mantle with a red border. His hair, eyebrows, mustache, and beard are white with details rendered in red. He too carries a herald’s staff, and he has raised his right hand to his eyes as if he were scanning the horizon. Behind him grows an exuberant plant of hybrid form with big clusters of grapes and trumpet-shaped red flowers. The youth and the old man
recall Hermes and Priam on the Paris Painter’s name piece, but who is the centaur they conduct? Is he a guest at a wedding, perhaps that of Perithous? These are questions that have to be posed but must remain unanswered at present. On the neck of the vase, above the main scenes, the painter has used a heraldic design dear to the Etruscans: two panthers, their heads conjoined, a device that on Etruscan soil continues well into the Middle Ages. The subsidiary frieze below the quaint floral band is given over to five bulls advancing to the left. But this is no
mere procession of animals: the artist has introduced a young neatherd dressed in a hat with the chin strap fastened, a white chiton, and a shaggy cloak, who belabors the last bull with a cudgel. He is followed by a bearded man of singularly unkempt, rustic appearance. Both carry spears, no doubt to ward off cattle thieves.

The other vase is almost wholly processional. Three centaurs march along on each side of the shoulder, like the solitary centaur on the first vase carrying small trees that have been uprooted. They do not, however, belong to his race or breed, for all six have human feet, and the humanization is carried even farther in those on the obverse, who also have human ears. One of them, moreover, is a boy centaur growing his first whiskers. Of his two companions one has a white beard, very striking in contrast with his red hair, and the other, his red beard neatly combed, wears a white animal skin. This picture has very much the air of an intimate family portrait, “three generations of centaurs.” The tribe on the other side, with equine ears, is equally differentiated. Again the centaur with the red beard wears a white animal skin. The one in front has a white beard and mustache but red hair, while the third has white hair and beard. Though the cast of their faces is as noble as that of their more human compatriots on the obverse, they are somewhat wilder: note the hair on their foreheads, which is not brushed back but allowed to fall almost into their eyes.

In the panels on the neck of this amphora are myrtle branches, arranged in a basket tied around its middle, eleven on the obverse, nine on the reverse.

In contrast to the tame procession of the half-domesticated centaurs stands the pride of lions in the subsidiary frieze. Six of them advance to the left, a seventh sits on its haunches, regardant. All of them bare their fangs, terrifying us with their bristling red hair on forehead, nose, and chin.

The accession numbers of the two vases are 55.7 (gift) and 55.11.1 (purchase); heights 13 7/8 inches (35.1 cm.) and 13 7/8 inches (35.3 cm.). On Etruscan vases of this class see Dümmel in Röm. Mitt., vol. 2 (1887), pp. 171 ff.; Ducati, Pontische Vasen; Dohrn, Die schwarzfigurigen etruskischen Vasen, pp. 33 ff.; and in Studi Etruschi, vol. 12 (1938), pp. 283-284, 287-289; Beazley, Etruscan Vase-Painting, pp. 1, 12, 295. To the list of vases attributed by Dohrn to the Paris Painter add the two neck-amphorae here published, a neck-amphora in Paris, collection Henri Mondor (Singleton Abbey Sale, Swansea, 13th October 1919 ff., no. 697, ill.; Plaisir de France, Nov. 1947, p. 38), and one in the Villa Giulia at Rome, from Cervetri (Mon. Ant., vol. 42 [1955], cols. 539-540).