An Attic Black-Figure Vase of the Mid-Sixth Century B.C.

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The Metropolitan Museum recently received on loan from a friend of the Greek and Roman Department a black-figured neck-amphora of exceptional interest (Figures 1–4).1 It demonstrates the expressiveness that an accomplished artist could achieve within the limits and traditions of his given shape, technique, and iconography; moreover, it conveys a sense of transition from one artistic generation to the next, for its decoration combines features of standard black-figure established during the second quarter of the sixth century with innovations that began to appear after mid-century.

The vase on loan is a neck-amphora of Panathenaic shape.2 The prize Panathenaic, whose introduction is placed in the 560s,3 developed parallel to the ovoid neck-amphora that flourished during the second quarter of the sixth century, and was particularly favored by painters of the Tyrrenian Group.4 As so often with Greek vases, the Panathenaic shape had its own significance, as is suggested by the fact that, together with the earliest known prize vase, the Burgon amphora in London,5 there appears one of the first reduced versions. The latter, in Oxford (Figures 5, 6),6 illustrates two features of these reductions. First, their subjects—here, the return of Hephaisiot—bear no reference to the shape. Second, the disposition of the ornament and decoration may resemble that of either amphorae or neck-amphorae; on the Oxford example, through the reserved neck and absence of panels, the connection is rather with the neck-amphora. Datable roughly a decade later than the Oxford example, the New York vase shows a similarly non-Panathenaic subject, a series of hoplite duels; in the palmette-lotus festoon on the neck, the alternating red and black tongues at the top of the shoulder, and the rays above the foot, it follows the ornament standard for mid-sixth-century neck-amphorae.

At this date, however, the placement of the figural subject on a neck-amphora had not yet become fixed, allowing for the unusual solution of wrapping the

A list of abbreviations is given at the end of this article.

2. H. 44.6 cm.; diam. 28.9 cm.; diam. mouth 17.3–17.6 cm.; diam. foot 15.1–15.4 cm. The vase has been reassembled from many pieces. The major losses on A include part of the helmet crest of the third combatant, most of the body of the second fallen warrior, part of the left leg and right arm of the fourth combatant, and the right side of the body and the face of the fifth combatant; missing from B is, especially, a piece from the chest of the third combatant. On the underside of the foot appear a dipinto consisting of an epsilon and a graffito consisting of two marks, one like an angular pothook and a second that could be either a delta or an alpha. Though neither dipinto nor graffito appears in A. W. Johnston, Trademarks on Greek Vases (Warminster, 1979), see pp. 128–150 for the “pothook.”
5. ABV, p. 89, 1 below.
6. Oxford 1900.107 (ABV, p. 89, 2 below). There are also vases whose shape approaches the Panathenaic, e.g., Munich 1447 (ABV, p. 81, 1 below); London 97.7–z1.2 (ABV, p. 86, 8). Yet another development consists of vases with ornament on the neck and glaze over the body, without figural decoration, e.g., Athens 1610.78 (AJA 42 [1938] p. 503, fig. 9); Ferrara T. 485 (CVA, pl. Z, 1).

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1–4. The Painter of Berlin 1686, Neck-amphora of Panathenaic shape, Attic, black-figure, mid-6th century B.C. H. 44.6 cm. New York, private collection, on loan to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, L. 1982.27.3

subject around the circumference of the pot. Important precedents existed. Dinoi such as those of the Gorgon Painter, Sophilos, and the Painter of Akropolis 606, and a volute krater such as the François Vase presented major mythological themes in extended friezes, for which these shapes were particularly well suited. More modestly, but also more pertinently for us, neck-amphorae of the second quarter of the sixth century regularly had subsidiary zones of

7. Neck-amphorae of Panathenaic shape with "all-around" decoration include London B 208 (ABV, p. 260, 29); Princeton 169 (ABV, p. 298, 6); London B 206 (ABV, p. 369, 120); Munich 1437 (CVA, pls. 339–340); Munich 1438 (CVA, pl. 341); London B 207 (CVA, pl. 47); and Boston 01.8059 (CVA, pls. 36 and 38, 1-2). See also M. B. Moore and M. Z. Phillipides, The Athenian Agora: XXIII. Attic Black-figured Pottery (Princeton, N.J., forthcoming), text and notes to "neck-amphorae of Panathenaic shape." Munich 1437 and 1438 are of additional note for their twisted handles. More generally, see H. Mommsen, Der Affecter (Mainz, 1975) pp. 15–16.

8. Louvre E 874 (ABV, p. 8, 1).


10. Athens, Akropolis 606 (ABV, p. 81, 1).

11. Florence 4209 (ABV, p. 76, 1).
animals or floral ornament encircling the body; occasionally also there was continuity from one side to the other in the primary scene on the shoulder. The single largest body of evidence is, once again, the Tyrrhenian Group, but other examples exist—in the oeuvres of the Camtar Painter\(^\text{12}\) and the Omaha Painter, for instance.\(^\text{13}\) With respect to shape and the placement of its decoration, therefore, our vase points to an artist who chose the less common of the possibilities available to him, and handled them masterfully.

If we turn to the figural decoration, an accomplished and very distinct artistic personality makes itself felt. The battle extends around the vase in a measured rhythm, without much variation in the intensity of the action. There are three pairs of fighting hoplites on each side, most of whom have the same equipment: a Corinthian helmet, a corselet worn over a short chiton, greaves, a shield, and a spear. It is in the detail of poses and attributes, however, that the painter's interest clearly lies. At the center of each side appear two combatants, evenly matched; the left one on side A (Figure 2) has a remarkable holder for his helmet crest, shaped like a kantharos. In three of the

\(^{12}\) Cambridge 44 (ABV, p. 84, 2); Louvre C 10521 (ABV, p. 84, 4 middle); Louvre E 863 (ABV, p. 84, 6).

\(^{13}\) Louvre E 861 (Para., p. 33, 1 bottom).
four flanking groups, one member of the pair is differentiated through his position: looking back as he tries to escape, or falling to one knee under attack from the front or the back. The progress of the conflict, as well as the identification of the main scene, is indicated by the fallen figures, two on side A, one on B (Figure 4). The former lie prone, not yet stripped of their armor, one in a deerskin (nebris) balancing his shield on his buttocks and legs, the other still holding his shield vertically; this warrior's helmet is distinguished by the crest holder in the form of a snake with tongue extended. The hoplite on B lies supine, partly covered by the shield, dying, as shown by his eye, but not yet dead, from the position of his limbs. The fact that these casualties have all fallen to the left points to the superiority of the force attacking from the left, though it is numerically inferior. The treatment of the fallen, moreover, was clearly also an artistic problem of interest to the painter, who presented them face up and face down, just as he juxtaposed the combatants in front and back view.

In the representation of the warriors, unquestionably the most conspicuous attributes—and, indeed, the most decorative feature of the vase—are the shield devices. Since a shield was worn on the left arm, the devices visible here belong to the hoplites of the losing force;¹⁴ this somewhat paradoxical situation, however, only contributes to one's impression that the

painter's concern lay as much with his own artistry as with the realities of the battle. The choice of devices is remarkable, and their effect is heightened by the fullest possible use of added color, particularly white. At the far left on A (Figure 1), the motif is geometric, horizontal stripes boldly alternating red and white. In the center, parallel, yet most graceful in their forms suspended against a reserved background, appear two leaping dolphins (Figure 2)—the white line on their bellies, now imperfectly preserved, would have reinforced the juxtaposition with the striped shield; the star motif below them suggests the height and ease of their leaps. At the far right, the device is a swarm, which, though far bolder, repeats certain forms of the dolphins in its pronounced beak and eye and in the curves of its wings (Figure 3). The first device on B, a large leaf, responds to the bird in its slender support and full, rounded lobes (Figure 3). The two remaining devices are utensils that stand tall on rather narrow legs, a tripod with ring handles in the center (Figure 4) and a folding camp stool (okladias) at the right (Figure 1).

From a purely visual standpoint, the placement of these motifs at regular intervals, within round shields of corresponding size, and at a level that gradually rises and falls around the vase, gives the composition cohesion while also emphasizing the sequence of events in the action. Whether more might be read into the meaning of the devices is impossible to say. One notes the presence of forms geometric and figural, animate and inanimate, living things proper to sea, land, and air. The selection testifies, in any case, to the breadth of the painter's imagination. That it provides the key to a specific mythological or historic encounter seems doubtful. Strewn over the field, with more than one to a figure, are letterlike characters of which only one is a real inscription, "Simonides" written retrograde by the head of the hoplite with the dolphins on his shield (Figure 2). The importance of this figure is emphasized still more by the bird flying toward him. He is, without doubt, the focal point of the main side but not thereby a figure more central to the action. Without inscriptions meaningful to us, here, as in so many battles in Attic vase-painting, the representation is best considered generic rather than specific.

Indeterminate though the subject may be, the personality of the artist manifests itself distinctly and on a particularly high level. As Dietrich von Bothmer was first to recognize, he can be identified as the Painter of Berlin 1686. Features that are so evident on the New York Panathenaique—clarity and a certain ponderous stiffness in both composition and figures, a predilection for detail especially in added white—appear on an amphora B last recorded in the Basel market, representing his best-documented shape, the vase has a palmette-lotus festoon above the scene and shows a hoplite duel over a third, fallen hoplite, with a woman watching on either side and a bird flying overhead. The amphora A, London B 197, depicts Herakles and Kyknos in a composition that is particularly symmetrical and, as in our Panathenaique, suggests that the figures have been stretched across the

15. Stripes as a device are surprisingly rare. G. H. Chase, The Shield Devices of the Greeks (1902; repr. Chicago, 1979) p. 68, mentions the amphora B, Munich 1985 (ABV, p. 310), and a bell-krater, Attic according to Chase, Naples 2914. D. von Bothmer calls attention to a plate covered front and back with alternating black and reserved stripes, Berkeley 83539 (CVA, pl. 31, 2); according to Römisches Institut photograph 50.90, the provenance is Terracina. Add the volute-krater in Syracuse (P. Orsi, "Sicilia: Siracusa," Notizie degli Scavi [1903] illus. between pp. 528 and 549); the amphora B (Sammlung Holger Termer: Kunst der Antike, Katalog 1 [Hamburg, 1982] no. 27).
16. Bothmer notes that a dolphin was the device of Odysseus (J. M. Edwards, Lyra Graeca [Loeb Classical Library II, pp. 66–67, no. 71 (Stesichoros)), and that two dolphins are the shield device of Athena on the Panathenaique prize amphora, Karlsruhe 65.45 (ABV, p. 144, 8 bis; Para., 61). It may also be worth mentioning that two dolphins leaping in the same direction occur on coins of Karpathos (B. V. Head, A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum IX [London, 1897] p. 194); two dolphins in opposite directions appear on coins of Thera of the mid-6th century (see, e.g., C. M. Krazy, Greek Coins [New York, 1966] p. 346). Currency having the actual shape of a dolphin seems to have been issued at Olbia (C. M. Fallani in E. Simon, The Kura-shiki Ninagawa Museum [Mainz, 1981] p. 289, no. 192). The numerous additions that can be made to the list in Chase, Shield Devices, p. 48, include New York 58.38 (ABV, p. 255, 10 bis; Para., p. 114); St. Louis 39.21 (ABV, p. 269, 40); London B 387 (ABV, p. 286, 3 middle); New York 41.162.190 (ABV, p. 287, x, 1); Bologna PU 194 (ABV, p. 288, 16); Rhodes 14093 (ABV, p. 307, 57); Astarita 45 (ABV, p. 693, 75 bis; Para., p. 133).

18. Shield with dolphins, diam. 7 cm.; tripod and okladias, diam. 6.8 cm.; stripes and swan, diam. 6.5 cm; leaf, diam. 6 cm.
19. Among the additions that Bothmer makes to the painter's oeuvre are an amphora type B, Florence 6, on each side a duel flanked by women; also a fragmentary, unnumbered amphora in Florence, on A a gigantomachy, on B a fight with a horseman in the center. See also note 26 below.
20. ABV, p. 297, 14 bis; Para., p. 129.
21. ABV, p. 296, 1.
notably by the Amasis Painter, before the advent of fully developed red-figure. His knowledge of such "anticipations" seems the more certain given the female figure on an amphora lent to the Elvehjem Museum; with her flesh parts drawn in outline and reserved, she cannot fail to recall similarly rendered women by the Amasis Painter.

22. Ibid., p. 296, 3.
23. Ibid., p. 296, 9.
24. Ibid., p. 296, 7.
25. See the women on the Samos fragments (ABV, p. 151, 18); Berlin 3210 (ABV, p. 151, 21); and the Basel amphora (Para., p. 65). But for the running meander to be discussed below, the influence of the Amasis Painter is less important in the New York Panathenaic than in other works of the Painter of Berlin 1686. While not a subject that can be pursued here, an amphora B in the Geneva market (A, the introduction of Herakles into Olympos: Herakles, Athena, Hermes; B, Dionysos between maenads and satyrs), for instance, would seem quite dependent on Amasean vases like the Ludwig amphora (Para., p. 65, third in list), Louvre F 25 (ABV, p. 150, 4), or Berlin 1688 (ABV, p. 150, 9).
9, 10. The Painter of Berlin 1686, Amphora. H. 42 cm. Bologna, Museo Civico, PU 192 (photos: Dietrich von Bothmer)

In a characterization of the Painter of Berlin 1686, Sir John Beazley wrote, “The artist has a good touch, and his figures have a pleasant rigidity which makes his vases look older than those of Group E, with which they must be contemporary.”27 One of the most important features of the New York Panathenaic is the extent to which it approaches works of Group E. The points of contact begin with the shape. While the artists of Group E did not greatly favor neck-amphorae, they produced a special variety28 whose characteristics include a palmette-lotus festoon on the neck, a subsidiary scene on each side of the shoulder, the principal scenes, which may or may not be separated by a palmette configuration under the handles, and a band of ornament circling the vase below. The Painter of Berlin 1686 decorated an example of this type29 with a representation of the death of Priam that recalls another of Group E.30 He may also have derived from the same source a feature of the New York Panathenaic like the all-around composition.

Considerably more remarkable, however, is the correspondence in decoration between our vase and a neck-amphora in the collection of Walter Bareiss (Figures 11–14); it has been attributed by Bothmer to the circle of Group E and the Painter of London B 174.31 In the center of side A (Figure 11) appear two hoplites, with Corinthian helmets, corselets, short chitons, greaves, round shields, and spears, fighting over a prone warrior stripped but for his helmet and partly covered by his shield in a position of semilevitation. To the left, a pair of warriors, similarly equipped, fight over one lying supine beneath the shield that rests on his chest and drawn-up knees (Figure 12); the combatant on the right has a large white swan as shield device. In the duel to right of center (Figure 13), the right-hand figure, who turns back, shows a five-lobed leaf as his device. On the reverse of the Bareiss neck-amphora (Figure 14) appear three hoplites facing left between a pair of mounted youths, shown from the front, and a pair of pedestrian observers. Of interest, once again, are the shield devices. The star pattern may be compared with the star on the shield of “Simonides” (see Figure 2).

29. ABV, p. 297, 19.

The lion protome\textsuperscript{32} recurs in the oeuvre of the Painter of Berlin 1686 on the amphora A in Philadelphia (see Figure 8); while the lion there is in black-figure and in rather damaged condition, it shows the same awkward transition between leg and paw as its counterpart on the Bareiss piece.

What is one to make of the correspondences between the two vases?\textsuperscript{33} If they are compared as a whole, it is clear that in virtually every aspect the Panathenaic was executed with more care and attention than the neck-amphora. Moreover, with the former, the subject of hoplite duels was considered sufficiently interesting to be developed, as in a theme and variations, around the whole vase; with the neck-amphora, it was treated like a set piece and added to another of similarly martial tenor with a minimum of transition. Under different circumstances, one would call the Panathenaic earlier than the neck-amphora. Heeding Beazley’s implicit warning, one may find it in all respects most satisfactory to conclude that they were

\textsuperscript{32} According to Bothmer, the lion protome as a shield device appears in the oeuvres of Lydos (Villa Giulia [ABV, p. 108, 14]) and the Amasis Painter (New York 06.1021.69 [ABV, p. 150, 2]; Louvre F 36 [ABV, p. 150, 6]; private collection [ABV, p. 152, 23], Figure 15; Riehen, Hoek [Para., p. 65]), spreading thereafter to other artists.

\textsuperscript{33} R. Lullies referred in passing to stylistic connections between Group E and the Painter of Berlin 1686 in “Eine Amphora aus dem Kreis des Exekias,” Antike Kunst 7 (1964) p. 85.
13. Side A/B

Additional support for this conclusion exists in the continuous meander ornament that frames the scene below on the Panathenaic vase. Typically for the piece, the ornament is perfectly integrated with the rest, complementing the predominantly leftward movement on the battlefield and, with its dot-saltires, continuing the use of fillers from the field above. In view of the variety of patterns with which the painter embellished the dress and furnishings of the figures, it is remarkable that the particular combination of meanders and saltires has no parallels in his oeuvre; other singletons, however, are the chevrons framing the panels on Chicago 1978.114.34 and the paired fronds above the panels on Bowdoin 15.44.35 A counterpart to the meander does, however, occur rather significantly on the ovoid neck-amphora by the Amasis Painter (Figures 15-17),36 placed by Bothmer toward the end of the artist's early phase.37 At the top of the panel, which is restricted to the widest portion of the pot, there is on side A (Figure 17) a band of meander running leftward with dotted saltire squares.38 While

34. D. von Bothmer in Moon and Berge, Midwestern Collections, pp. 52-53.
35. ABV, p. 297, 13.
38. On Berlin inv. 3210 (ABV, p. 151, 21), the panels are framed on each side by a continuous meander. The key pattern appears on other early amphorae of type A, notably on one side of the handle of Orvieto, Faina 78 (ABV, p. 144, 9) by Exekias

15. Side A

16. Side B

17. Side A, detail
the coincidence between this vase and our Panathenaic is not complete, one feels, once again, that the distance between them could be measured in paces across the Kerameikos.

Surveying the evolution of black-figure through the sixth century, one finds that, by mid-century, the technique had been fully mastered, the various shapes had acquired their respective schemes of decoration without, however, inhibiting the artists’ creativity, decoration tended to become concentrated in a few large fields of generally narrative content; the major artists, therefore, could devote themselves to refining the use of the medium as well as heightening the expressiveness of their subject matter. The Painter of Berlin 1686 occupies a firm place within this milieu, ever more so with the appearance of new studies of his œuvre and new pieces of superior quality, like the New York Panathenaic. The latter brings two aspects of his artistic personality into sharp focus. First of all, the piece testifies to his knowledge of the work of leading contemporaries, the Amasis, Painter and Group E. Secondly, it discloses his flexibility and ability—if not facility—in very successfully decorating an uncommon shape in an uncommon way. Indeed, it demonstrates admirably the interaction between challenge and response that maintained the vitality of Attic vase-painting for almost two centuries.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABV—J. D. Beazley, Attic Black-figure Vase-painters (Oxford, 1956)
AJA—American Journal of Archaeology
CVA—Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum
Para.—J. D. Beazley, Paralipomena: Additions to Attic Black-figure Vase-painters and to Attic Red-figure Vase-painters (Oxford, 1971)

who, according to Bothmer, is responsible for introducing the ornament to the side of flanged handles. (See also H. Bloesch, “Stout and Slender in the Late Archaic Period,” Journal of Hellenic Studies 71 [1951] p. 29, n. 2; E. A. Mackay, “Exekias: A Chronology of His Potting and Painting,” diss. [Victoria University of Wellington, 1981] p. 229.) Unconventional variants of the meander motif occur in contemporary vases as well, e.g., Basel market (ABV, p. 304, 3 top: Para., p. 151) and Hanover 1936.107 (CVA, pl. 7, 1 and 3) by the Painter of Munich 248 as well as the unattributed amphorae B: Villa Giulia 46734; Hanover 1967.11 (CVA, pl. 5, 2; 6, 1 and 2); and Munich 1309. The continuous swastika meander on the lip of the hydria Florence 94319 (CVA, Florence 5, pl. 22) anticipates the motif on Munich 2344 (ARV², p. 182, 6) by the Kleophrades Painter, whose inventiveness with meander ornaments remains unsurpassed.

39. Though perhaps coincidental, of interest here also is the shield device of a swan on B.