

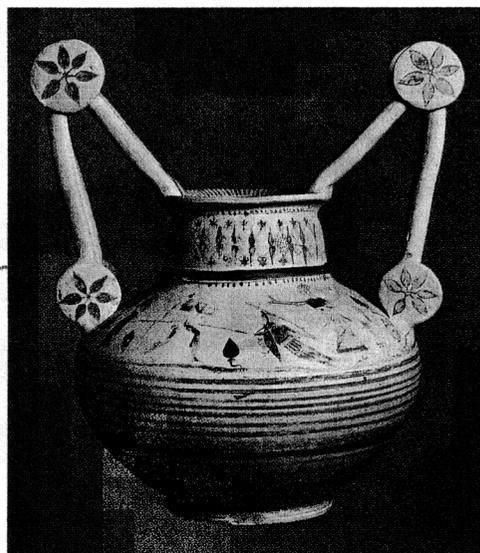
Among the precious legacies mankind has inherited from Magna Graecia are the painted vases of the Classical period. Some might consider this statement an exaggeration, or that – without exactly contradicting it – it should be circumscribed and limited inasmuch as other regions of the ancient world produced ceramics of equal quality, especially if we include the products made by the Athenian potters and vase-painters in the sixth and fifth centuries, when this kind of art was at its zenith, which were by far superior to other regional workshops. What was decisive for the development of vase-painting in Magna Graecia was that the artists steered their own course, introducing a repertoire of forms and images that distinguished them early on from the Attic models, whose influence was limited only to the start of their activity. The result is a treasury of artistic creations which must be considered utterly unique.

In the strict sense, by “Italiot” vase-making we mean the production of ceramics – in Apulia and Lucania as from ca. 440 B.C., and a little later, i.e., as from the fourth century B.C., in Campania and at Paestum – using the red-figure technique acquired from the mother country, instead of the earlier black-figure technique. Red-figure vases were also produced in Sicily from the late fifth century B.C. This kind of artistic production developed therefore in the cultural climate of the cities founded by the Greek colonists, in specific milieus that differed to a greater or lesser extent from those of Mainland Greece. Among the characteristics peculiar to the *poleis* was the highly profitable exchanges with the local populations living in the neighborhood of the Greek settlements. While on various occasions this proximity culminated in warfare, did however prevail peaceful coexistence and reciprocal influence for periods of varying length.

The spread and use of Italiot vases, even in remote settlements in the interior, together with their utilization in local necropolises together with other indigenous ceramics and products, are clear proof of the great influence of Italiot culture in Magna Graecia. Moreover, the role of these vases as carriers and interpreters of ideas and images should not be underrated. The way in which these images were assimilated by the local population provides us with significant information about the cultural level of the latter. It certainly cannot be said that the Greek cities in southern Italy were surrounded by “savages” without little or no civilization of their own. The shapes and decoration of several Italiot vases reflect the taste of their local customers. Traditional, non-Greek shapes (in particular, the *nestoris*, known as the “trozzella” in Italian) have been found decorated with the red-figure technique but illustrating people dressed in native costumes and bearing local weapons (for example, the Messapii in Apulia, the Oscans and Samnites in Campania).

Tarentum (Taras) and Paestum (Poseidonia) provide two opposites illustrating the relations between the descendants of the Greek settlers and the native peoples. On the one hand, we have the old colonial city of Spartan origin, in constant contact with the mother country, with rich traditions and a sophisticated Hellenic culture, and on the other, a city which was dominated, in the period we are examining, by the Lucani. The whole of the Paestan production of red-figure vases lies within this Lucanian period, excluding a brief interlude, from 336–332 B.C. If we consider Paestum as a “Lucanian

Messapic black-figure *nestoris*
[two-handed storage jar]
500-475 B.C.
Copenhagen
Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek
Cat. 138



Messapic black-figure *nestoris*
end 6th cent. B.C.
Lecce, Museo Provinciale
Cat. 139



Black-figure *amphora*
 from Campania
 500-490 B.C.
 Siena
 Museo Archeologico Nazionale
 Cat. 140



city," the classification of the subject matter becomes even more interesting, since the knowledge of the contents of the ancient tragedies has apparently remained unchanged. Evidence of this is provided by the vase-painting referring to Aeschylus or, more frequently, to Euripides. Highly amusing, extraordinary scenes from the comic theater are also present on Paestan vases. The only two Italiot vase-painters who signed their wares, Assteas and Python (no other signatures have survived from the other South Italian workshops) were active in "Lucanian" Paestum. These two leading vase-painters – who were probably potters as well – worked in one of the most important Paestan potteries. To return for a moment, to the beginnings of Italiot vases, in Athens the transition from black-figure to red-figure vase-painting took place as far back as the last quarter of the sixth century B.C. Why then did the production of red-figure vases only start in southern Italy several generations later, that is, toward 440 B.C.? The answer to this question is particularly complex and we must consider both external and internal causes. We will deal with the external causes first. After the long Peloponnesian War, toward the end of the fifth century B.C., the flow of imported wares from Athens declined drastically. Until then buyers in Magna Graecia had preferred to purchase original ceramic ware from Attic potteries instead of stimulating local workshops to adopt the Greek techniques (a fairly suitable comparison to this situation has sometimes been made with the modern phenomenon by which only authentic *haute couture* direct from Paris will satisfy certain tastes), now they had to try to satisfy their wishes by other means. At first the demand could be more or less met by the production of potters who had emigrated from Athens when the changed conditions of their own city forced them to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The fact that the first Italiot vases are hardly different from the Attic ones leads us to believe that they were indeed produced by these Athenian immigrants. One stimulus – though not the only one – was probably offered by the foundation of the Panhellenic colony of Thurii in the western area of the Gulf of Taranto in about 443 B.C. The new settlement grew up near the site of the once famous city of Sybaris, which had been destroyed. Athens played a major role in establishing the colony and therefore Athenian culture was able to spread in a more immediate way, without the time-consuming voyages across the sea. As early as 1893 Adolf Furtwängler upheld the view that it was the very foundation of the new colony that was decisive in starting the local production of red-figure vases. Furtwängler's theory need not be altogether discarded, although to the present day there have not been any discoveries (traces of kilns or suchlike) in the area of the ancient city to confirm it. However, in the area of the city of Metapontum, situated further east, excavations have brought to light material that proves the presence of an ancient workshop with fragments of vases that date from the time of the ear-

Red-figure *amphora*
from Nola
first half 5th cent. B.C.
Vatican City
Museo Gregoriano Etrusco
Cat. 141

Red-figure *amphora*
with the birth of Helen
from Paestum
ca. mid 4th cent. B.C.
Paestum
Museo Archeologico Nazionale
Cat. 216

ly-Lucanian Amykos Painter to the Dolon and *Creusa* Painters, of a slightly later date. In order to understand the internal causes of the delay in the spread of red-figure vase-painting, we should make a careful examination of the earlier production of pottery in southern Italy. Unlike the Greek motherland it seems that there was a lack of real interest in these areas in representing the human figure. The products of the ancient local potteries are all characterized by the preference for relatively abstract, ornamental, geometric designs. Even during the periods of closer contacts with Italiot vase-painting, the use of figurative subjects remained an exception (as for instance on very few Daunian and Messapic vases in Apulia). This characteristic appears to be applicable to the assimilation of the earlier black-figure technique as well. While, for example, in the late sixth century B.C. various workshops in Etruria produced some highly original black-figure vases, in southern Italy similar attempts were sporadic. Black-figure vases from Campania were influenced by Etruscan ware, while the rare local Apulian black-figure production proposed original but simplified silhouette figures, which differed from the attempts at characterization found in the ancient Attic models. It is interesting to note the survival of the black-figure technique in the production of one type of vase in particular, the small *Pagenstecher lekythoi*. These *lekythoi* seem to have been produced from the late 4th century B.C. at various places in Campania as well as in Sicily and the most successful examples prove that this style – only apparently obsolete – could nonetheless result in aesthetically satisfying results.

A particularly delightful example of probable local production but of a much earlier date, from the end of the 6th century, is the black-figure *amphora* of ca. 520 B.C. (Museo Nazionale, Taranto). The subject matter is a lively scene of a bird hunt with an owl as a decoy.

Early attempts at introducing the red-figure technique, dating to a previous period or, partly contemporary with the development of Italiot vases, are even rarer. One of the reasons for this could lie in the fact that this kind of technique was relatively difficult, and required the acquisition of certain skills. There is proof however that an isolated workshop in the province of Campania – the so-called “Owl-Pillar-Group” – was attempting to create red-figure vases before the mid-fifth century B.C. The rather clumsy application of this technique and the unusual style of the figures is appealing to modern eyes. Alongside the true red-figure vases, we should also mention the “imitations” with superimposed reddish slip, a few examples of which have been found in Apulia, while the majority came from Paestum and its surrounding area. The Paestan version of these imitation red-figure vases has been studied only recently, thanks to well-documented finds, and is now considered particularly significant in reconstructing the first period of Paestan pottery. These vases, with their rather opaque figures painted with diluted reddish clay, should not actually be considered as mere imitations of models whose craftsmanship was beyond their reach; instead they represent a particular form of decoration that probably corresponded more closely to the requirements and tastes of the craftsmen and their clients.





opposite
 Apulian red-figure *krater*
 with sculptor's workshop
 attributed to Boston Group
 first half 4th cent. B.C.
 New York
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art
 Rogers Fund, 1950
 Cat. 288

The fairly differentiated picture that we have today of the Italiot ceramic workshops is prevalently due to Arthur Dale Trendall, who spent nearly sixty years of his life (and after 1961, sometimes with the collaboration of Alexander Cambitoglou) examining and classifying the red-figure vases to date in Magna Graecia and Sicily. Future work in this field, that can draw on new findings and their contexts, will nevertheless remain indebted to the fundamental studies published by Trendall in several epoch-making volumes. Over the last few decades the present generation of scholars, particularly of Italians, has been able to make significant advances toward obtaining a proper focus of the native peoples. In this sense, the historical question of cultural receptiveness becomes a central issue: Italiot vases assume particular interest when seen in the context of reciprocal exchange, and their historical significance becomes more critical for our better understanding of the highly complex structure that is Magna Graecia, which owes much of its specific nature to its being rooted in the Italian peninsula.

We will now consider some of the characteristics of the various Italiot workshops. There were two distinct geographical groups: in the East, the areas on the Adriatic and the Ionian with their respective hinterlands, that is Apulia and Lucania (modern Basilicata); in the West, Sicily, Campania, and Paestum. The distinction (proposed by Trendall) between Apulian and Lucanian vases, while not being accepted today by all scholars as a rigid formula, is nevertheless a useful working model, since these regional groups developed along completely diverging lines until the end of the fourth century B.C.; however, in the later fifth century there still existed parallels and similarities between them. Thanks to the important discovery of the above-mentioned kilns at Metapontum, it has been possible to localize at least the initial stage of so-called Lucanian vase production. The concentration of the finds of Lucanian vases belonging to the period after ca. 380 B.C. – all brought to light in the interior and nearly always at a certain distance from the coast – suggests that the successors to this workshop were forced, apparently, to leave the Metapontine area. An examination of the vases and their more and more provincial style reveals that contacts with cosmopolitan Tarentum (Taras) had dwindled considerably, or had even ceased to exist. The most important city in the east of Magna Graecia, Tarentum must certainly have been one of the major centers of Italiot vase production; and yet no evidence to endorse this supposition – such as remains or materials used by workshops – has yet come to light. (With reference to the more recent discoveries of kilns that do not date back to the period in question, and for the presence of Tarentine clay, see also N. Cuomo di Caprio, "Les ateliers de potiers en Grande Grèce," *BCH*, suppl. 23, 1992, p. 69ff.). Given that the modern city of Taranto has been built directly over the ancient site, the possibility of carrying out excavations is extremely limited, and systematic research on a large scale is evidently to be excluded. On the basis of their characteristic differences, and depending on the statistics of their discovery, the Apulian vases of later production (mid-fourth century onward) can be attributed to various places of production. Throughout this period, in addition to Tarentum, where in all probability the Darius Painter and his colleague the Underworld Painter were active, there was another significant area with its own workshops, namely the Daunian territories north of Apulia (Canosa, Arpi). One of the vase-painters here was the highly productive Baltimore Painter (who it seems ran a flourishing, well-organized business), another was the highly original Arpi Painter.

In this rather brief survey, special attention should be paid to the Apulian vases which constitute about half (ca. ten thousand items) of the known production of South Italian red-figure ceramics. They have met with particular interest not only among specialists of ancient pottery. Leaving aside Attic vases, whose range of imagery is in fact quite different, no other kinds of vases have provided so varied and original evidence for the assimilation of Greek myths and their reproduction in ancient drama. Not among Apulian vases are those decorated with a scene which is unique in its kind. There are, for example, mythological scenes that have no equivalents elsewhere and can sometimes (though not always) be linked to written texts which have survived in part or entirely. The favorite source of theme material in Apulia – and in the rest of Magna Graecia – appears to have been the tragedies of Euripides. The close connection with the contents of these works is already evident in the earlier Italiot vases, produced during the latter part of the author's lifetime or not long after his death. On this point, we should bear in mind the famous tomb discovered at the site of Heraclea (near Policoro), dating to about 400 B.C. The tomb contained, for example, a *hydria* with the oldest image known of the infanticide Medea fleeing on a chariot drawn by serpents. Considering the contents of the scene, the concept differs slightly from Euripides' version of the tragedy (staged in 431 B.C. in Athens): on the vase, Medea appears to be leaving her dead children behind her. Similar vase-pictures from the same source seem to be even more faithful to Euripides. For example, there is Dirce (from the myth of Antiope)

Red-figure *hydria*
with the infanticide Medea
fleeing on a chariot
drawn by serpents
end 5th cent. B.C.
Policoro
Museo Nazionale della Siritide

Red-figure *pelike*
with the torture of Dirce
tied to a wild bull
end 5th cent. B.C.
Policoro
Museo Nazionale della Siritide
Cat. 220/III



and, in particular, the scene with Heracles' children, the Heraclids, who, together with the aging Iolaus, are seeking refuge from their persecutor on an altar. This is a specifically Attic myth illustrating the noble role of protector assumed by the city of Athens. However, there is no trace of Euripides' tragedy of the Heraclids in the Athenian vase-painters' output, at least as far as we know today (the same is generally more or less the case of all the great Athenian theatrical works of the Classical period which seem to have left but indirect traces in the city's artistic production). Southern Italy, however, has revealed more than one representation of the Heraclids. Probably, the *pelike* bearing this subject, found in the above-mentioned tomb at Heraclea, had a special significance for the city, whose name clearly derives from Heracles. It must be noted, however, that the Labors of Heracles, one of the favorite subjects of Attic and other vases of Mainland Greece in the Archaic period, as well as the adventures of Theseus, were no longer popular with southern Italian painters and their customers.

The vase-paintings, to various degrees inspired by theatrical works, must be understood as evidence of a distinct artistic genre, and it would be a mistake to consider them merely as secondary sources for our reconstruction of literary texts, given that the material is transformed into an image, therefore involving the use of the specific medium of painting, and is expressed in a language that is very different from that of poetry.

Derivation from the stage, or rather the theatrical nature of the subject matter, may be grasped more directly, it seems, in the comical scenes. In this case, the actors are portrayed with their comic costumes and grotesque masks, and even the setting is included as a more or less improvised stage. These so-called *phlyax* vases were not produced only in Apulia. In addition to the considerable Paestan output, and the fine Sicilian examples of these farcical scenes, recent finds – in particular, the Würzburg bell-krater, belonging to the early Apulian period (about 370 B.C.), bearing a picture apparently drawn directly from Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*) support the thesis that the majority of the so-called *phlyax* vases did not represent rustic forms of local theater but rather were inspired by the Attic comedies. This supposition is even more convincing when we consider that – to our knowledge – *phlyax* plays were at their peak in southern Italy at the time of the poet Rhinton in about 300 B.C., when illustrations of comic situations on vases (perhaps wrongly defined as scenes from *phlyax* plays) had already ceased being produced about a generation earlier.

The problem of inspiration diacon either from the theater or from the broader realm of mythology, cannot be separated from the even more crucial question of the function of the vases. We should always remember that the majority of these vessels – and this is also true for the output of other workshops in southern Italy – were destined, from their conception, for tombs. The sepulchral character of the ceramic ware is reflected in some of the shapes which are impractical for daily use. For example, the tall *lutrophoroi*, a variety of the *amphorae* but with a much more complex structure, sometimes egg-shaped or cylindrical with handles shaped like spiralling tendrils, are typical funerary vases.

Red-figure *pelike*
with the legend of the Heraclides
end 5th cent. B.C.
Policoro
Museo Nazionale della Siritide



The floral decoration which, in this case, involves the whole shape of the vase, evokes the wider context of funeral symbolism in Southern Italy. Painted decorations often include elaborate floral settings with polychrome buds and flowers. When these floral images become the central motif, represented inside the typical tomb 'naiskos' – as exemplified by some vases – the significance of their symbolic value becomes still more evident. They impart a consoling message that, even though we do not yet understand its nature, life exists beyond tomb.

Tomb scenes are the principal subject of many south vases, whereas such themes are all but lacking from Siceliote vase-painting. In Apulia, representations of shrines (*naiskoi*) increased considerably from the second quarter of the fourth century B.C. The tomb occupies the center of the scene, and is represented as an open building with columns, like a small temple. Inside it there are the dead, man or woman, sometimes accompanied by small groups of relations. The people within the *naiskoi* are painted white; this may have two meanings. On the one hand, it refers to the whiteness of stone, making the human figures gravestone statues; on the other, the color white distinguishes and isolates the deceased from the other living human figures visible outside the shrine. The latter are in fact painted with red-figure technique, that is, with the color of life. The painters of the Apulian funerary vases developed a rich and highly significant system of symbols conveying an idea of life in transformation, and the omnipresence of memories as a source of vitality. The numerous gifts of the visitors to the tomb, such as flowery garlands, mirrors, fans, and various types of bowls, are primary components of this pictorial language.

All the symbols painted on the sepulchral vases of the late Apulian period – the large bunches of grapes and the ivy leaves, the tambourines and *thyrsi* held by the visitors – are clear references to the world of Dionysus, in his persona as god of the Dionysiac Mysteries. One noticeable feature is that, without exception, the bearers of offerings near the tomb are all young people, both male and female. They cannot, therefore, represent the families of the dead persons, as elderly people and children are absent. There are no signs of mourning or lamentation for the dead. They appear to carry out their pious rites quite serenely. Are these young men and women meant to be members of a mystic community, united by their confidence in a blissful life in the other world? The Dionysiac symbols referred to above indicate the kind of mystery that might have generated the religious significance of these burial scenes.

This brings us to a particularly important question concerning the study of Southern Italian vases. For a long time scholars have speculated as to whether the scenes they depict contain references to ancient mystery. The ties with Dionysus are self-evident; they can be discerned also on many other vases whose imagery does not refer explicitly to the tomb. Much evidence in Magna Graecia points to the fact that the Dionysiac, like the Eleusinian mysteries in the motherland, had widespread significance. In this respect, the words of the chorus in Sophocles' *Antigone* are frequently quoted



Kalynx krater from Paestum
with scene from a *phlyax* play
mid 4th cent. B.C.
Berlin, Staatliche Museen
zu Berlin Preussischer
Kulturbesitz, Antikensammlung
Cat. 227



Red-figure *naiskos krater*
 attributed to the white Sakkos Painter
 ca. 320 B.C.
 Matera, Museo Nazionale "D. Ridola"
 Cat. 336

(v. 1119) at the point in which Dionysus is named as the protector of Italy. This reading should not be discarded even though R.D. Dawe in his next edition of the text from 1979 has proposed an emendation for the word "Italia".

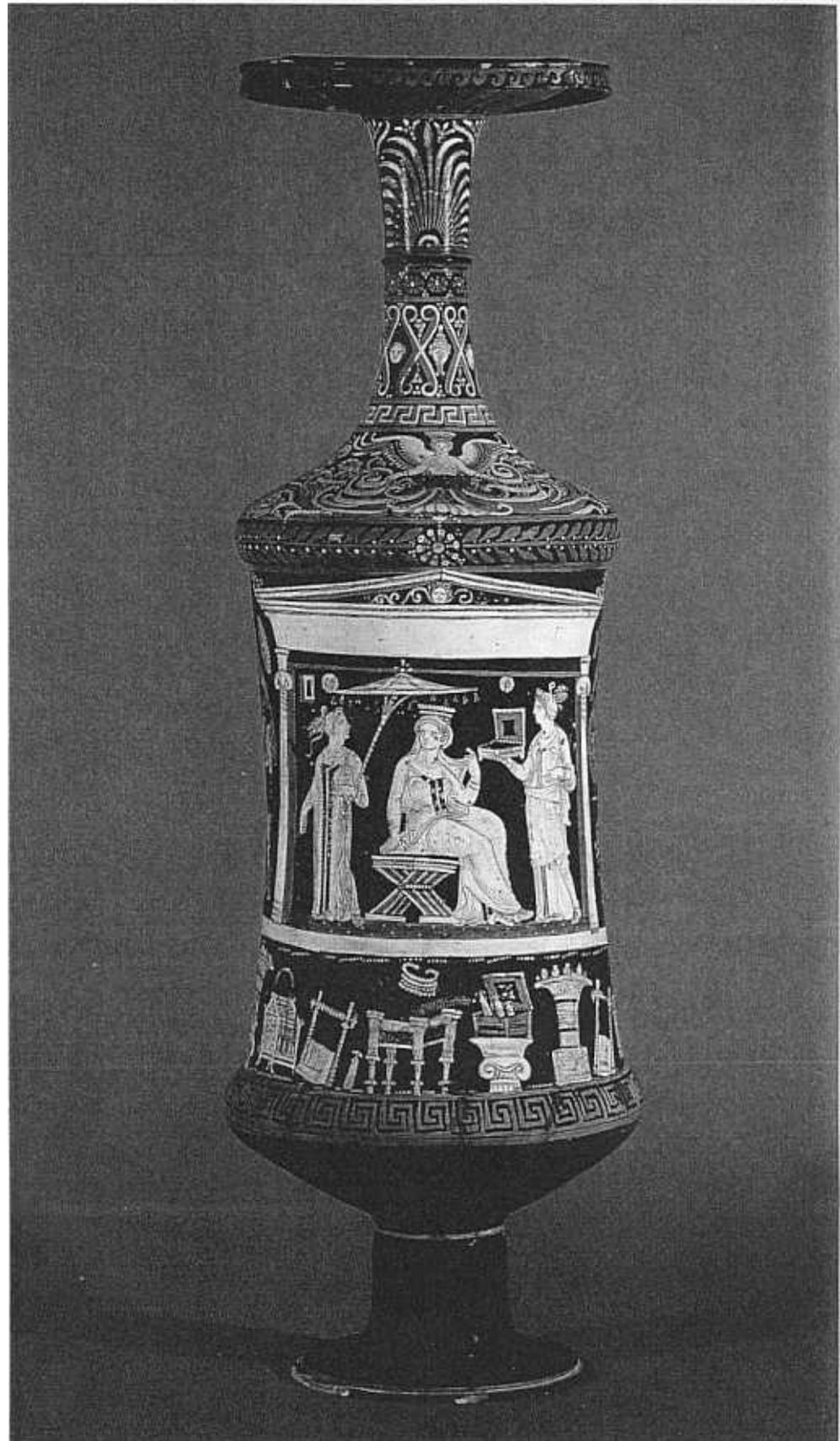
By contrast, material evidence of the presence of the Orphic Mysteries in the images on Italian vases is much harder to find. Obviously, one will have to look first at those representations that include the Thracian singer Orpheus himself, and particularly the underworld scenes painted on a specific group of Apulian monumental volute kratesis – the so-called *Unterweltsvasen*, which are without real parallels in other areas of the ancient world. They convey a lively and complex image of the underworld, with the blessed and the damned or penitents, each one in his own place, ranged around the palace of the lords of the Underworld. Only a few mortals possess the privilege of returning to the world of the living, as a free choice, such as Heracles, who carried the dog Cerberus out of Hades, and Orpheus himself. The presence of Orpheus in the Underworld does not, however, seem to be motivated primarily by his mission, to save his wife Euridice. In fact, the heroine herself does not appear in any of these pictures except one. The aim therefore of the artists was perhaps to portray Orpheus, independently of his own personal myth, and to reveal him as the bearer of hope for all mankind, or, at least, for his own followers. It is very difficult to understand his role in these images especially because we are not sure how the story was thought to end in the period of the Apulian vases in the fourth century B.C. It appears that in an ancient variation on the myth of Hades, Orpheus did not fail, but really



Red-figure *naiskos krater*
attributed to the Copenhagen Painter
ca. 340 B.C.
Matera, Museo Nazionale "D. Ridola"
Cat. 339

succeeded in bringing Euridice back to life. Given this happy ending, he must have seemed much more suitable in the role of a sort of intermediary acting between mortals and the lords of the Underworld. But, if the Apulian pictures were in fact based on the idea of the disastrous attempt to reunite the mythical couple, there is still the fact that Orpheus, at one point, succeeded in moving the gods of the Underworld and in winning them over thanks to the charm of his music.

The presence of the three Judges of the dead (Minos, Rhadamanthys, and Aeacus/Triptolemus) in some of these depictions of the Underworld means that the place assigned to human beings here depends on their merits. Various motives lead us to believe that the task of these judges is not limited to the moment in which the dead enter Hades, but that throughout their sojourn in Hades they are continually judged for the good and evil they do. On the basis of their merits, the destiny of the dead might perhaps be improved or mitigated. Must the Danaids, who are often pictured in these images, really exhaust themselves eternally as they pour water and strive to fill the leaky *pitthos*? On some of these Apulian vases, the representations of these "damned" women give the impression that they are not actually doomed to cruel and tremendous punishment, nor are they without any hope of reprieve – indeed, they appear to be serene. However, besides the Danaids, there are other condemned figures, chained and guarded by demons, and, lastly, there are the damned *par excellence*, Sisyphus and Tantalus, whose torments in the Underworld are eternal. There are then different levels of existence in the Underworld, ranging from the damned to the righteous (one of the



latter being the seer Amphiaraos who is given a friendly welcome by Hades on several of the vases). We are led to infer that the judges continue to survey the conduct of men even after their death, and this might be connected to the famous cycle of reincarnations, the metempsychosis, forcing mortals to be reborn and to die again and again. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that these reincarnations were considered a sentence rather than a blessing. In some cases we can suppose, unfortunately without being absolutely certain, that echoes of the idea of the reincarnation cycle are also reflected in the pictures on Italiot vases.

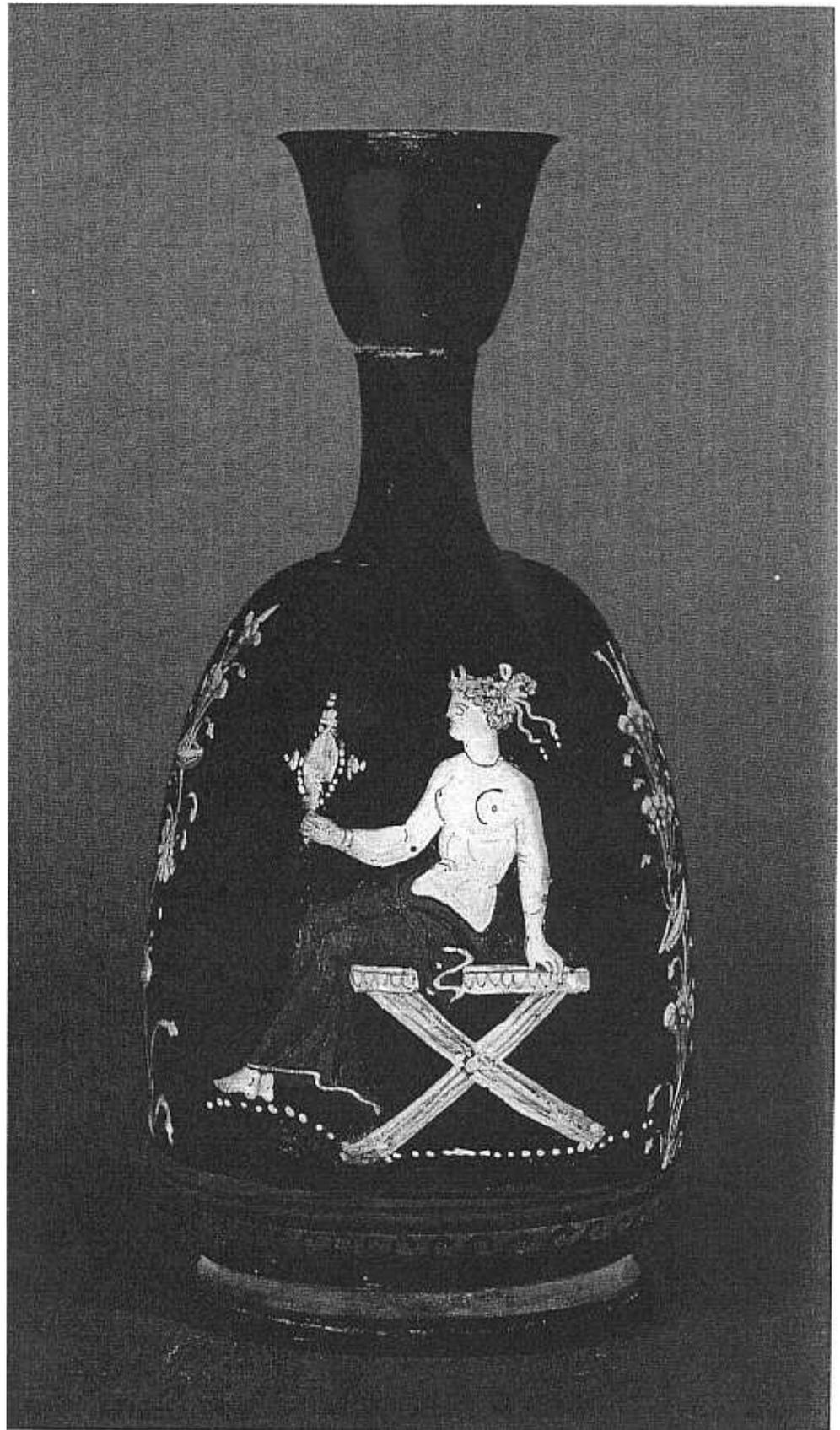
We must keep in mind the destination of the vases as gifts for the dead, not only when trying to interpret the images that contain evident references to the tomb (*naiskoi* vases) or to the Underworld. The portrayal of a myth on a drinking cup for a *symposion* changes considerably when depicted on a funeral vase. Some myths are intrinsically linked to the theme of death, such as the story of Niobe mourning for the loss of all her children. In the Italiot representations of this myth, found both in Apulia and in Campania, there is hardly any reference to the cause of Niobe's unhappy destiny. She has been punished for the pride which led her, the mother of numerous children, to consider herself superior to the goddess Leto, who had only two children. The pictures on the sepulchral vases prefer, instead, to show the mother mourning inside the funerary monument, or over the tomb of her dead children. The bottom part of her figure, starting from the feet, is painted white to indicate the beginning of her turning into stone caused by her deep grief. It is hard to judge whether an image of this kind was meant to bring consolation and what the exact significance of the message was. Perhaps the message these mythological images had to convey was rather simple – to make men realize that even heroes have to bear trials and formidable destinies that are often much more cruel than those of mortals. Such a reflection might make the onlooker's own destiny appear easier to bear.

In the pictures showing Niobe at the crucial moment of her transformation into stone, the white pigment is not used as decoration, but is meant to give a precise message. This reminds us of the observation emphasized above, that the deceased inside the funerary monument depicted in the '*naiskos*' scenes were also painted white to characterize their new existence as separated from the living. The added colors, used frequently in the later Southern Italian vases, do not always have a deeper meaning; however, color was generally used to intensify the pictorial effect. It appears that the Italiot vase-painters closely followed developments in the realm of "great painting," and made an intelligent use of the new techniques. The use of colors and tones served to portray objects in an illusionistic manner, with, for example, the glint of the shining bronze shields of the warriors, or the superbly crafted precious vessels. The most knowledgeable use of color was achieved in painting the elaborate floral settings, florals which were sometimes even drawn in perspective. These florals decorated the necks of funerary kraters, and symbolized – as we said above – the vigor of life in continual renewal. In order to capture the qualities of an image as we perceive it with our senses, the painters tried to catch the play of light and shade, the bloom on a bunch of grapes, in which the side illuminated by the sun and the one in shadow were distinguished by different shades of color. The means used were still limited to those in the repertory of potters and vase-painters, but they were used with extraordinary ability. Naturally, the colors were achieved by nothing but different kinds of clay which, thanks to differing degrees of density achieved through dilution, provided a rich range of tones. Skillful employment of this type of coloring can be admired in the Gnathia pottery, which was produced from the second quarter of the fourth century B.C., most probably first in Tarentum and then in other workshops in Apulia and elsewhere. The Gnathia potters, whose vases were generally rather small, exploited the charm of the dark metallic painted surfaces, which contrasted markedly with the colored decoration, often consisting of miniaturistic vignettes recalling still lifes. The Gnathia pottery range, strongly tied to the Dionysiac tradition, included theater masks of outstanding realism. These masks corresponded to actual characters from the comic stage.

While this rather brief panorama of Italiot vase-painting has not been able to include a discussion of individual painters, we cannot ignore the most important Apulian vase painter, active in the second half of the fourth century, known as the Darius Painter. This name derives from one of his most important works, the monumental volute-krater in Naples, known as the "vaso dei Persiani" characterized by one of the very rare representations of a historical subject. The rather complex scene is an episode from the wars between the Greeks and the Persians. King Darius, identified by an inscription, is enthroned in the center. To understand the significance that this scene must have assumed in southern Italy in the third quarter of the fourth century, it is worth noting that, in that very period, the old rivalry between Greeks and Persians had suddenly flared up again: the peace im-



Apulian red-figure *amphora* with Orpheus and a dead person attributed to the Ganymede Painter 330-320 B.C. Basle, Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig Cat. 214



posed by the Persians in 387–386 B.C. had led to the establishment of the Corinthian League in 338–337, as a reaction to that self-same “peace.”

The works of this great master provide a perfect example of the pictorial achievements in Apulia mentioned above. One of his most remarkable qualities is the talent with which he characterized the human face and expressive features. His character studies give the impression that he was well acquainted with the new theories of physiognomy beginning to develop in his time.

The Darius Painter is one of the major representatives of late Apulian vase-painting, known as the ornate style, of which the elaborate and often very large volute-kraters are perfect examples. From the second quarter of the fourth century increasing numbers of these typical kraters were produced in Apulia, with Gorgon heads in relief attached to the end of the curving handles. This particular type was only been produced in Apulia. In fact, volute-kraters are rarely found west of southern Italy, even in their more simple, original form, inherited from Mainland Greece, and potters preferred to develop their own special shapes. There was a curious preference for “composite vases” in Campania, especially in Paestum. The basic shape, for example, could be a *lebes gamikos*, a container with a cover and curved high handles rising vertically; as the Greek name suggests, these were originally linked to the rites of marriage. They were fashioned in such a way that a second vessel – such as a small dish, a *lekane*, – could be placed on the flat knob of the lid. On top of this, there could be another much smaller and simpler *lebes gamikos* which, in turn, supported yet another vessel, this time a small *squat lethykos*. Many other kinds of combinations of basic shapes have been found, with a preference for the so-called “wedding container” and the *lekane*. Since the examples found were funerary vases, it is clear that these apparently hybrid shapes were not some kind of overblown ornamentation, but were probably expressing a message. We get the impression that the multiplication of certain shapes could be explained by the desire to underline the content of the message that each of these vases carries. Clearly the combination was worth more than the individual pieces, and this synergetic value had nothing to do with the exterior appearance; it was a question of transmitting this “something extra” to the dead. In more general terms, the composite vases concerned the reinforcing of single items involved in rites (which might not necessarily have been limited to the funerary sphere, but could have also referred to specific aspects of the world of the living).

We have already noted that the scenes depicting visits to the tomb typical of the majority of the Apulian *naiskoi* vases are totally unknown among Siceliot vases. In Campania, however, scenes around the tomb were very different in the early period. The center of the scene is occupied by a simple funerary *stele* rather than a monument. There is a lack of differentiation in the organization of space, and no distinction between the deceased and the living. Apulian influence is easily recognizable at the time when the vases produced in the western workshops begin to portray the characteristic group around the central *naiskos*. Relations between the various workshops are evident in these cases of Apulian influence. At Paestum, for example, in some works of the highly talented and original Aphrodite Painter one detects a transition in style from an Apulian (on rather an Apulianizing) to the Paestan phase. Potters and painters did not always remain in the same place (as can be seen in the Lucanian workshops). The Aphrodite Painter, who was active in Paestum, may provide an instinctive example of an individual craftsman who decided to travel to the West. Correspondences that can be observed between the early productions of Sicilian and Campanian workshops also reflect the mobility of these craftsmen. In spite of the specific stylistic features that developed over time in the main regions, Apulia, Lucania, and Campania, we ought not regard these various areas of production as distinctive self-contained units. Within these regions there were rather the individual cities and settlements with their local workshops to be considered. They were the ones responsible for establishing the productive structures, not the more abstract entities of the wider geographical regions as we know them today.

Pottery in Sicily developed along completely original lines. In the first half of the fourth century, the Greek or rather Siceliot area was limited to the east of the island, whereas the west was dominated by the Carthaginians. The period from the death of Dionysius I of Syracuse to the overthrow of tyranny in 342 B.C. upon the intervention of Timoleon was apparently little suited to the development of workshops of any quality. It is only partly true that the evolution of Siceliot vases can be examined with greater precision than the production of southern Italian workshops because we can rely on dated grave contexts. In fact, modern numismatists no longer agree about the dating on certain kinds of coins that had been confidently used to establish some of the dates in question. Among the more famous of the Siceliot vases are those rare specimens depicting scenes from the theater. They are particularly interesting because – in contrast with what we are used to from south-



Vase of the Persians
large volute *krater*
by the Darius Painter
detail
Darius enthroned holding
a council of war
second half 4th cent. B.C.
Naples
Museo Archeologico Nazionale



Nuptial *lebes*
combination vase
second half 4th cent. B.C.
Naples
Museo Archeologico Nazionale

ern Italian vases reflecting scenes of tragedy – the Siceliot painters endeavored to represent at least part of the actual architectural structure of the stage.

There is no doubt that most of the imagery on Siceliot vases refers to the world of women, with numerous examples, and in a much more exclusive way compared to other Italiot vases, even though, in Apulia too, there are also frequent scenes that refer to the figure of Eros. The peak of this exclusiveness of female representations can be found on the typical vases produced on Lipari (Aeolian Islands). Here men do not appear at all. If there are no male figures, for whom, then, is Eros unveiling these solemn and lovely brides? Once again, the Lipari vessels are for funerary use. The women are presumably attending to a deity rather than a mortal: their destiny is another life altogether, in the Underworld. These scenes, which apparently refer to a wedding, are cogent proof of the close tie between marriage and death, a concept which seems to have been one of the principal beliefs of Magna Graecia.

The majority of the Lipari vases bear polychrome decoration. Numerous examples are colored with light blue, which was otherwise rarely used. The delicate use of colors continued in vases from Centuripe, a type that belongs to a later period of Siceliote production, already in the third century B.C. Through the finest vases produced at Centuripe, we can obtain a glimpse of the consummate skills of the great panel and wall-painters.

At the end of this survey let us again ask what this extraordinary world of images has to offer us. In fact, the vases of Magna Graecia require to be carefully deciphered. We must avoid misinterpreting their often bizarre forms as somewhat abstruse deviations of their creators. Everything about these vases is deliberate; everything was designed with a specific funerary significance. Even their shapes express hope in transformation rather than some form of annihilation. The mythical scenes decorating them, like some endless book of enchanting illustrations, convey a clear message: the destiny of heroes and heroines is not so different from that of humankind. The farcical scenes make us smile, as they did our forebears. And these are the scenes where we are still face to face with men as they really are: neither the rather unearthly Dionysiac initiates, nor the deceased who no longer belong to our world, nor the denizens of Hades.



Polychrome figured *pyxis*
by the Lipari Painter
first half 3rd cent. B.C.
Lipari, Museo Archeologico
Regionale Eoliano
Cat. 390