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VASE PICTURES

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BOARD XXXII

N° 4a, 4b the outsides, N° 4c the profile of a terracotta device that emerged from the athenic art trade in 1843, which was transferred from the collection of Queen Amalie to the varvakion. It's supposed to have been found in Athens or Korinth, affirmed in a grave, and consists of two discs which are 0,116 m in diameter and being parallel to each other, connected in their centers by a cylinder which is about 0,01 m in diameter. Although pictures were published two times, one time in color, more precise information seems demanded.

As the publication shows the pictures are set up right against each other; the center of one (Peleus and Thetis) is a bit damaged, the other disc is cracked once. The figures are set red, the letters ceramic red into the black background. The snake and Thetis' bangle are white, Nereus' curly hair is painted in a reddish brown.

The shape of the object is rare; I'm familiar with only one other device of that kind. It's from Attika and is also said to be found in a grave, supposedly in a woman's hand. F. Matz saw it in Athens in the summer of 1869 and described it precisely; I don't know about its current whereabouts. Those two discs are only 0,055 m in diameter and are decorated with paintings on white chalk ground: around a center picture (Helios – Europe on the bull) a surrounding illustration (robbing of the Leukippides – kidnapping scene).

Concerning the determination of the device Ludwig Ross pointed out the similarity of the well known toy that winds up and down on a string. It is so simple that it finally may be presumed without any evidence, but it could be approved by the inner picture of a red ornamented bowl that is part of the Berlin Collection, that I transmit hereby from a precise drawing that was kindly conciliated by Georg Treu. The carriage of the arm, the bent line which describes the string, the absence of another player, even the lines on the "ball-esque item" could be validly made in favour of the proposed interpretation; also it is not known to me that balls can be found tied to strings, and the illustrations on the outer side of the bowl, which show in obviously intended contrast boys with book rolls and musical instruments in serious school work, indicate that it must be a very easy, idle game. But terracotta would be, since it's manufactured that weak, an inappropriate material and Ross himself noticed correctly that the cylinder connecting the discs would have holes to fasten the string, which it has not.

Ludwig Preller on the other hand reminded of the in great number preserved, mostly on both sides ornamented marble relief discs, that were hung up for decoration of walls and intercolumns, and of some terracotta relief discs of Greek and south Italian origin gathered by Millingen, that seem to have had a similar determination. Not ignoring the essential difference of those really massive objects, he thought he was allowed to assume that the device was hung up in a similar manner with ties or ropes, with the inner gap being designed to fasten them in a way, that "allows the ties to hang down on both sides, exactly like it can be seen on many Pompeian wall paintings" --- in a way a transfer from the buckles and agraffen that were used to knot and pin up clothes to the suspending draperies of rooms and halls.

The reasons just mentioned are also in opposition to that interpretation; especially for the second specimen it's very improbable because of its smallness and the technique used for its ornamentation and it would give no explanation of how items of that kind could end up in graves. This last, in both cases expressly testified circumstance, doubtlessly indicates a more direct, personal use of the device in domestic life. Since it's tectonic shape corresponds to that of a spool, that's rim discs varied in size and distance depending on the kind of rope that was intended to be wound up, one would naturally think, just like Lebas and Otto Jahn did, of a thread reel. Storage in a wool basket could protect it from it's own fragility, that would be reduced anyway when a thread was fully wound up to the outer rim.; for a use of that kind the decorations, that mostly relate to adventures with women on both specimens, would not be chosen inappropriately and be composed skilfully. On the one the circumcising stripes on the rim, on the other the crossing composed, reverse moving figures, facing to the right on the one side, to the left on the other, would be in decorative concordance with the on- and backwards directed moveability of the device – details of course, that surely weren't intended consciously, but, like every meaning of an ornament that resulted from reflexion and was formulated through it, resulted from the naive rhythm all by themselves.



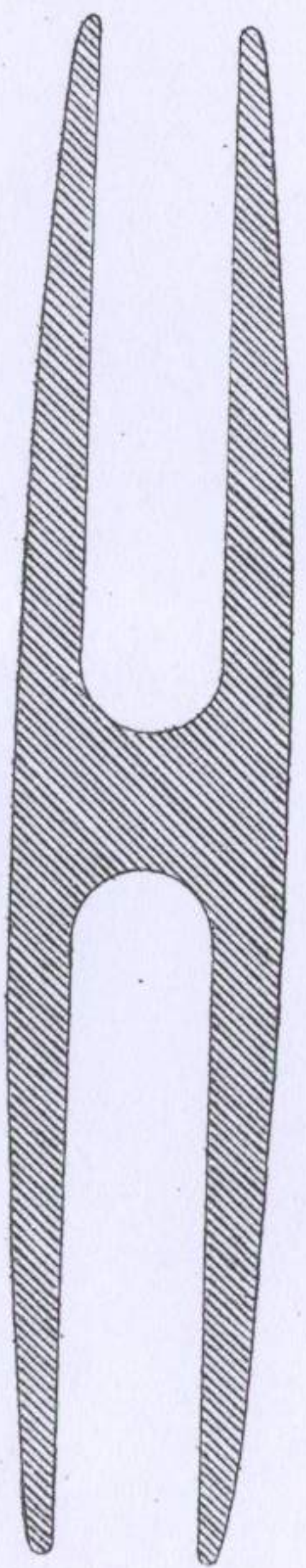
The beautiful symmetry of both compositions on our specimen is striking on the first glance; on closer examination special intention and care about details are revealed. To indicate anger Thetis' eye is opened wide with the pupil moved to the bottom lid. Her hair is arranged around her forehead in a double line of fine painted little curls, that couldn't be pictured properly in the lithography. Her right hand, which is not drawn correctly and a little damaged on the original item, emerges behind Peleus' back, sending out a snake that bites his neck; a scene that is analogue to the illustration on the Kypselos-box, of which Pausanias draws special attention to this aspect. For the characterisation of resistance the more decent motive of a pursuit is used, not the pattern of a wrestling match, on which older illustrations of this theme are based.

Genealogic and objective relations may have had influence on the choice of the second picture, of that bottom ornament is in some measure the counterpart to the writing on the other side. A second sea demon, Thetis' old father, is overcome by Herakles to predict, after failed transformations, the way to the Hesperides. "His gesture tells", as Peller notices, "the evading surprise and the questionable character of the experienced old man, letting himself come down to an answer, who shared his secrets under pressure only". As in all proved cases Nereus is pictured completely human here, in long garments and with a sceptre, the insigne of his sovereign dignity. Heracles wears a quiver that is, in eastern custom, closed with feather cover, on his side, and his bow that is attached to the quiver with two leather straps.

The inscriptions **ΓΕΛΕΒΟΣ-ΘΕΤΙΣ**, that seem to have been overlooked or badly reported, are clearly and completely preserved. Inscriptions on vase pictures, especially from the older eras, are, as it is known, often written in genitive - sometimes even next to nominatives. But **Πελεος** could maybe be understood as a nominative, if Leo Meyer has rightly recognized **ηφος** as the original ending for the nouns that end in **εως**, that have the "casus obliqui" in Homer's writings almost exclusively in the open form and evidently kept the diacriton for a very long time.



4^a



4^c



4^b

