

A MISLEADING LEKYTHOS IN THE VILLA GIULIA MUSEUM

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In the last number of *Talanta* a black-figured lekythos in the Villa Giulia has been published by H. S. Versnel.¹ The author approaches the subject, "Iakchos", from an iconographical point of view and he ends his article by the following remark: ". . . if any uncertainty about the authenticity of vase or paintings should remain from now on the fight should be fought by the archaeologists . . ."

I had mentioned the vase in a footnote in my *Attic Black-figured Lekythoi*, defining it as a forgery of the lekythos Berlin 1961.² It therefore seems up to me to explain the Villa Giulia lekythos, purely as the archaeological object it represents.

The Villa Giulia lekythos³ was acquired on the Roman market, July 1920, provenience unknown. The shape of the vase is characteristic of the later categories of Attic lekythoi, the straight cylinder type, current from 500 B.C. onward; see further below. Yet, the aspect of the vase gives rise to uneasiness,—there is something rigid and dry in its outline, there is some lack of proportion.

Our main interest, however, is concentrated on the decoration, rather than on the vase itself. The painting—with the net-pattern above applied on a whitish slip—is an out-right forgery, since the picture and inscriptions are copied from the black-figured lekythos Berlin 1961. The scene represents Herakles among deities, Herakles in Olympos.

The Berlin lekythos,⁴ provenience Sicily, a very careful piece,

¹ H. S. Versnel, "Iakchos", *Talanta* 4 (1972), p. 32-38, with pl. III-V.

² Haspels, *Attic Black-figured Lekythoi*, p. 49, n. 2, quoted Versnel, *Talanta* 4 (1972), p. 34, with n. 1.

³ Villa Giulia Museum, no. 42884; ht. 0.36 m.

⁴ Berlin Museum, no. 1961 (676); ht. 0.33 m. Gerhard, *Berlin's Antike Bildwerke* I (1836), B, Vasenbilder, no. 676, p. 219-220; Gerhard, *Auserlesene Griechische Vasenbilder* I (1840), pl. 69-70, 1-2; Furtwängler, *Kgl. Museen zu Berlin, Beschreibung der Vasensammlung im Antiquarium* I (1885), no. 1961 (676), Herakles among deities, Hermes, Athena, Dionysos, Ares; name above

entirely red-ground, somewhat restored, originally belonged to the Royal Collections; these, before the foundation of the museum in 1828, were in the art gallery of the Royal Palace in Berlin. I discussed the vase among the black-figured cylinder lekythoi of the Leagros period,⁵ and Beazley put it in his list of the Leagros group.⁶ The date, therefore, is 510-500 B.C.

The Berlin lekythos was adequately published in the drawing of Gerhard, *Auserlesene Vasenbilder* I (1840), pl. 69-70, and it seems plausible to assume that the painting of the Villa Giulia lekythos⁷ was copied directly from this design. The attempt at accuracy in the copy comes out well in the three inscriptions; compare, for example, the loose-limbed *kappa* in the Herakles inscription, and in the Hermes one, the final incomplete *sigma*.

The painting of the Villa Giulia lekythos when compared with the Berlin lekythos shows decided weaknesses. In particular, the figure of Dionysos is conspicuous for the meagre treatment of the upper part of the body (outline of shoulder and breast), for the way in which the foot becomes entangled with the diphros leg, and for the too slanting eye. Indeed all the eyes look somewhat curious: notice the currant-like eyes of Hermes and Ares.

The incision is apt to be ragged;⁸ the Villa Giulia copyist no doubt met with some hindrance from the underlying slip.

Added red paint has been dealt with carefully; only, the outline of the crest of Ares' helmet is in mat brown, and it was not continued over the right-hand shoulder and back.

In all these points the painting of the Villa Giulia lekythos ranks below that of the Berlin lekythos of Leagros group quality.

One wonders what kind of black paint was used by the Villa Giulia copyist. It gets out of hand and runs unevenly. It especially thickens at the end of a stroke. See for example on the figure of Herakles, at the elbows, ankles and feet, at the end of the scabbard,

Dionysos, restored; Genick, *Griechische Keramik*, pl. 39, 2 — reversed; Möbius, *AM* 41 (1916), p. 202, fig. 16 (phot., detail).

⁵ Haspels, *Attic Black-figured Lekythoi*, p. 49.

⁶ Beazley, *Attic Black-figure Vase-painters*, p. 379, 273 (restored).

⁷ See *Talanta* 4 (1972), pl. III-V.

⁸ Compare the Ares figure of the Villa Giulia lekythos, *Talanta* 4 (1972), pl. V, with the one of the Berlin lekythos, *AM* 41 (1916), p. 202, fig. 16.

on the lion's skin beneath the chin of Herakles, and at the end of the lion's paw, hanging down.

In the Berlin lekythos the Iakchos inscription above Dionysos (spelled Iakchne) is a clear case of daring restoration. Furtwängler, in his catalogue of the Berlin vases,⁹ points out that of the Iakchos inscription only the last two characters are partly ancient, and he adds that the reading no doubt should be [Dionys]os. This verdict naturally also applies to the Villa Giulia lekythos.

Now to come back to the Villa Giulia lekythos itself. This is a straight-shaped cylinder lekythos, the shape originally used by the Edinburgh painter, the chief lekythos painter about 500 B.C.; he was the first to coat the picture surface with a white slip. The tall cylinder type has a broad, rounded base, and the foot from now on varies greatly,—torus, trochilus, or in two degrees. The shape used by the Edinburgh painter is carried on chiefly by the Athena painter, whose prime falls about 490-480 B.C. The Athena painter, moreover, is the first black-figure artist to paint the neck of the cylinder lekythos black. Henceforth, the black neck becomes the rule, continued on semi-outline and outline lekythoi.¹⁰ During their later development, the shape tends to become elongated, especially in the curve of shoulder and neck. A good example of an outline lekythos in this later shape is: Fairbanks, *Athenian White Lekythoi* I, pl. I, 1.

Here, then, there is a straight cylinder, on a torus foot, white-ground, black-necked, elongated; by its shape—though accepted only with some reservations (cf. above, third paragraph)—the vase represents the type of lekythos of the period after 480 B.C. The painting on the other hand copies the style of the Leagros period, 510-500 B.C. The combination of these two features gives a perverse result: needless to say, in normal circumstances the pot antedates the decoration.

Thus we are justified, all things considered, to define the Villa Giulia lekythos as a forgery.

⁹ See above, n. 4.

¹⁰ For the development of the lekythos shape in general, see Haspels, *Attic Black-figured Lekythoi*, passim. The later stage, of the Athena painter and his successors, is also treated in Fairbanks, *Athenian White Lekythoi* I, Group A, Class I and II, p. 22-58 and pl. I.

*Postscript**H. S. Versnel*

When I was preparing my note on Iakchos, Professor Hemelrijk warned me that there might be something queer about the Villa Giulia-vase. I mentioned his warning in my note p. 33 and I may now add that he still adheres to his verdict. After having received the positive judgment of four archaeologists who have examined the lekythos personally, I thought it would not be too adventurous to make some remarks on the lekythos and the inscription "Iakchne". Professor Haspels has now given her arguments for her view that the lekythos in the Villa Giulia is a forgery, a view she had presented before in her *Attic Black-figured Lekythoi*.

Let me emphasize first that I do not wish to go back on my decision, quoted by Professor Haspels, to leave the discussion on the authenticity to the archaeologists and, secondly, that in my opinion any evident instance of falsification should be noticed as soon as possible, so that it cannot haunt the literature any longer. However, in this case there is a complication: not every archaeologist to whom I submitted Haspels' arguments was as impressed as I was, in fact some of them were not convinced at all. This being the case, I think I may point out a difficulty which arises as soon as one considers the Villa Giulia-lekythos a forgery.

In my note I started from the assumption that this lekythos was genuine. The Berlin lekythos had never been suspected except for the inscription "Iakchne". On p. 34 of my note I gave a survey of the learned discussions on this lekythos. According to Fürtwängler there were only two authentic letters left, which he read as $\alpha\zeta$. Iakchne was, he thought, a modern restoration. The letters $\alpha\zeta$, of which Fürtwängler gives a reproduction, are extremely vague, in fact not certain at all. Moreover, something mysterious appears. The literal text of Fürtwängler reads: "darüber steht IAKXO Σ wovon jedoch nur das folgende antik ist" (here follow the two mutilated letters). The mystery is that the inscription does *not* read IAKXO Σ but clearly IAKXNE, and the problem becomes even more intricate when we notice that more authors in the 19th century reproduced IAKXNE in their pictures, but in their texts mentioned an inscription IAKXO Σ (I quoted some instances on p. 34).

Now, if the lekythos of the Villa Giulia is genuine, the Berlin inscription is not problematic. If we assume with Fürtwängler and Gerhard that the inscription is modern, it can only have been copied after the Villa Giulia-vase. But if one assumes that the latter is a forgery, problems arise. I need only quote Haspels: "In the Berlin lekythos the Iakchos inscription above Dionysos (spelled Iakchne) is a clear case of daring restoration". I think in the circumstances the term "daring" an understatement. For we are asked to believe that a restorer, instead of writing above a person who is obviously the god Dionysos, the name of that god (making use of some remaining letters which could be read as $\omicron\varsigma$), preferred to "restore" an inscription which does not occur on any vase, viz. IAKXNE, moreover not writing this "name" in a comprehensible way but giving it an extremely fanciful spelling. I can imagine a restorer with an unnatural and pernicious longing for originality. If he did not wish to write "Dionysos", he might have thought of "Iakchos". In that case he only would have added IAKX to a couple of letters which one might interpret as -os. He would never have changed these letters into something which would serve a unique, odd and uncredible invention IAKXNE. In my view there are only two explanations possible. Either the Berlin inscription is genuine (in which case there is no reason why the Villa Giulia lekythos should not be a copy of the Berlin lekythos, though this has not been *proved*), or the inscription is a modern restoration, which seems to be more probable, and in that case must have been copied from an existing authentic inscription, viz. that of the Villa Giulia Lekythos.

That I am not alone in being somewhat suspicious about a *modern* restoration 'IAKXNE' is best illustrated by the manipulations of the 19th century specialists. Though honestly reproducing IAKXNE in their pictures they managed to change it into IAKXO Σ in their texts. Even Professor Haspels' formulation "the Iakchos inscription above Dionysos (spelled Iakchne)" has a touch of ambiguity.

I realize that it is the task of an archaeologist to judge the work of art, not the degree of mental aberration of a restorer. However, as long as the specialists have not reached unanimity concerning the genuineness of a vase—and this is in fact our situation—it is not only legitimate but also necessary to point out the difficulties either of the interpretations implies. The difficulty that I have pointed out should not be ignored in the discussion.