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Relief with Two Maenads

350-300 BC

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Object Details

Catalogue Number	34
Inventory Number	71.AD.222 
Typology	Relief
Location	Taranto region
Dimensions	H: 6.4 cm; W: 15.2 cm

Fabric

Beige in color, decorated with foil gilding. Traces of pink color on the back.

Condition

The gilding has worn off in a number of areas; a fragment of the base is missing, as is the lower extremity of the vegetal element on the right side. The extremities of the relief have been filled. The faces of the maenads are worn.

Provenance

– 1967, Leo Mildenburg (Zurich, Switzerland); 1971, Royal Athena Galleries (New York, New York), sold to the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1971.

Bibliography

SELECTED WORKS 1971, no. 64; KINGSLEY 1976, p. 14, fig. 39; LULLIES 1977, pp. 242, 247, no. 1.

Description

Two maenads are stretched out across a rocky base, bracketed at the ends by two acanthus plants with curving leaves. The figure on the right, with torso seen frontally and legs crossed in three-quarter view, turns her head toward her companion and lays an arm around her; with her right hand, she lifts a large tympanon, which touches the plant. She wears a V-neck chiton with sleeves, belted beneath her breasts, and a himation softly draped over her legs. The maenad on the left, slightly foreshortened, carries the *thyrsus* in her lap; her himation leaves her right shoulder uncovered. Both maenads wear their hair loosely pulled back; it is piled up in the middle on the left-hand figure. In the middle of the base is a hole for attaching the relief to a wooden sarcophagus; at the back of the relief, extensive traces of pink pigment are visible.¹

The relief, made with a mold, is an openwork with hand-finished details; gilding was commonly used on fictile products in order to imitate more expensive varieties of decoration. These appliqués were produced in Taras in the second half of the fourth century BC in conjunction with the revival of lavish funerary customs, probably inspired by luxurious objects from Macedonia and Scythia; they were exported to a number of centers in Magna Graecia. Such a relief was probably fastened to the head of a *kline* (bed) and arranged so as to create friezes in a dynamic and flamboyant style. For this reason, the most common themes were narratives that lent themselves to a compositional continuum, such as the battle between Lapiths and Centaurs or that between Gryphons and Amazons or Arimasps, with clear iconographic and formal references to the limestone funerary reliefs that were popular in Taranto beginning in the first half of the fourth century BC.²

A relief in Basel, practically identical to this one, also preserves similar traces of pink pigment and was dated by Lullies to the third quarter of the fourth century BC.³ Recently, on the basis of the iconography and the Dionysian themes, a parallel was proposed between Tarentine appliqués and a bas-relief ivory figurine found in the second tomb of the royal necropolis of Vergina, intended as decoration for a wooden funerary *kline*; this comparison revives the problem of economic and cultural relations between the two areas.⁴ Some themes, such as pairs of real and fantastic animals, or Dionysian figures partly outstretched on the ground with drapery wrapped around their legs, can be found also in the tempera-painted decorations on the marble *klinai* of the chamber tomb from Cassandreia, dating from the end of the fourth century BC.⁵ A late fourth-century terracotta from Morgantina presents in the front a painted panel, probably part of a garment, representing a ritual scene with two figures comparable to the maenads of this appliqué: a seated female holding a tympanon against a pink background next to a reclining maenad probably holding a *thyrsus*; two female

dancers are placed symmetrically at the sides of the panels. The scene, in this case as in other painted panels on Sicilian busts, is connected to the cult of Demeter and Persephone, the tutelary deities of Sicily, protectors of the fecundity of nature and of women, and deeply connected with the chthonian sphere.⁶

Notes

1. On Tarentine openwork reliefs, see LULLIES 1977, with bibliography; Tarentine reliefs also spread to other centers in southern Italy; see, for example, DELLA TORRE AND CIAGHI 1980, p. 56, pl. XXIII, no. 1.
2. In this connection, see BERNABÒ BREA 1952, pp. 199–201. For the motif of curly acanthus leaves, curving symmetrically inward at the edges, see esp. figs. 57 and 208. For the possible derivation from luxuries of Macedonia, Scythia, and Thrace, see B. S. Ridgway, “Court and Hellenistic Art,” in RIDGWAY 2004, pp. 158–84.
3. HERDEJÜRGEN 1971, pp. 61–63, fig. 19, no. 55.
4. See A. M. Prestianni Giallombardo, “Dibattito,” in *AttiTaranto* 41, 2001 (2002), pp. 327–28.
5. See B. K. Sismanides, *Klines kai klinoeideis kataskeues tōn Makedonikōn taphōn* (Athens, 1997), pp. 21–74; F. Colivicchi, “Tra banchetto, sonno e morte: Simbologie dionisiache sui letti funebri ellenistici e romani,” in I. Colpo, I. Favaretto, and F. Ghedini, eds., *Iconografia 2001: Studi sull’immagine: Atti del Convegno di studi Padova, 30 May–1 June 2001* (Rome, 2002), pp. 273–87.
6. For the bust, see BELL 1981, no.106, pl. 27. It has recently undergone cleaning and conservation treatment with pigment analysis by the Getty’s Antiquities Conservation Department. These treatments have revealed details of the painted scene and yielded more information about the bust’s pigments and the production technique. For painted panels on terracotta busts, see PAUTASSO 2007.