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Statuette of an Amazon

300-200 BC

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Object Details

Catalogue Number	33
Inventory Number	71.AD.138 
Typology	Statuette
Location	Taranto region
Dimensions	H: 11.4 cm; W: 8 cm

Fabric

Orange in color (Munsell 5 yr 7/8), porous, with reflective inclusions; a layer of white slip.

Condition

The figure is missing the hands and the left ear covering, and there is a gap in the right side of the cloak; the surface is worn. The cloak has been restored in an inappropriate manner: the left edge partially covers the area where the ear covering once rested.

Provenance

– 1969, Pino Donati (Lugano, Switzerland); 1971, Royal Athena Galleries (New York, New York), sold to the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1971.

Bibliography

Unpublished.

Description

The character is depicted in a crouching position. The head is inclined to the proper left, the arms are extending forward, and the hands may have held a weapon (a sword or an axe). The figure wears an enveloping tunic that extends down to its feet, which is fastened in the front by a broad band with a raised edge; it wears a fluttering short cape about its shoulders; on its head is a Phrygian cap with broad earflaps, from which curly locks of hair and a spherical earring emerge. In the back, there is a small, oval-shaped hole: the body and the head were made with bivalve molds; the arms and the feet were added to the figure before firing.¹

The statuette must originally have been correlated with another figure, and probably formed part of the plastic decoration of an Apulian or Canosan vase; such vases were often adorned with groups of warriors in motion.² As to the iconography, the Eastern headdress links this figure to the typology of the Amazon, depicted in motion as she is about to deal a blow with her weapon. The theme of Amazons in combat enjoyed great popularity in southern Italy during the Hellenistic period, and it is documented in a variety of materials, with special diffusion of the theme in funerary contexts. Amazons are generally depicted in vigorous movement that either raises their clothing or uncovers their breasts, and in situations of combat with Greek warriors, though there are very few comparisons for this particular crouching scheme. Although Amazons are more commonly depicted with a short chiton, the long tunic with a central sash beneath the breasts points in any case to an Eastern context.³ Often confused with the Arimasps, legendary Eastern warriors who were mostly depicted fighting griffins and with whom they shared numerous iconographic characteristics, the Amazons presented signs of femininity and differentiation, signs which in some cases consisted solely of ornaments such as earrings and bracelets.⁴ The iconography of the Amazons first began to take on funerary significance in Asia Minor and was introduced to Taras in the fourth century BC, forming part of the iconographic repertory of funerary monument decoration.⁵ The statuette may generically be assigned to the third century BC.

Notes

1. Before the Getty acquired it, this statuette had been identified as a fisherman and mounted on an inappropriate trapezoidal base (71.AD.138.2), a procedure that is not uncommon in artifacts intended for the antiquities trade.
2. The crouching position can also be found in figures decorating the vases of Canosa; see, for instance, the *epichysis* (wine pitcher) from the Lagrasta I hypogeum of Canosa depicting a female figure on her knees, with a cape puffing out over her shoulders, datable from the third century BC, in R. Cassano, "Gli ipogei Lagrasta," in CASSANO 1992, p. 214, fig.6. See also the statuettes of warriors in *CERAMIQUES ANTIQUES* 1987, nos. 141–42, with bibliography; and F. van der Wielen, "La ceramica a decorazione policroma e plastica," in CASSANO 1992, pp. 520–29.

3. For the iconography of the Amazons in southern Italy, see P. Devambez, s.v. "Amazones," *LIMC* 1 (1981), pp. 586–655; F. van der Wielen-van Ommeren, "Groupe de figurines en terre cuite: Amazonomachie," *AntK* 36 (1993), pp. 68–75; for the diffusion of the Amazonomachy in Taranto, see LIPPOLIS 1994, pp. 109–27; for the presence of the theme in soft-stone reliefs as well: CARTER 1975, p. 17, and BERNABÒ BREA 1952, pp. 205–6. The dynamism of the figures and the soft movement of the drapery is a distinctive characteristic of the Tarentine sculpture of the third and fourth centuries BC.
4. For the relationship between Arimasps and Amazons, see GORBOUNOVA 1997; K. Schauenburg, "Arimaspen in Unteritalien," *Revue Archeologique*, no. 2 (1982), pp. 249–62.
5. In this connection, see P. Devambez, s.v. "Amazones," *LIMC* 1 (1981), pp. 646–47, n. 3.