


55

Statuette of a Woman with a Kithara

LATE THIRD-EARLY SECOND CENTURIES BC

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Object Details

Catalogue Number	55
Inventory Number	73.AD.151 
Typology	Statuette
Location	Sicily
Dimensions	H: 19.8 cm; D (Base): 8.3 cm

Fabric

Pinkish orange in color (Munsell 5 yr 7/4), with a friable consistency and numerous micaceous inclusions; polychromy over a white slip: pink (base and clothing), purple (hair, kithara); red (chiton and feet). The statuette (head and body) was made from single mold.

Condition

The base was reconstructed from five fragments.

Provenance

– 1973, Jerome M. Eisenberg (New York, New York), donated to the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1973.

Bibliography

Unpublished.

Description

The statuette depicts a young female musician who, with a cadenced step, walks toward the viewer's right. With her right hand, she plucks an instrument carried on her left shoulder; given its small size, the instrument can be identified as a "cradle kithara." Her weight is on her right leg, which steps forward, while her left leg is slightly bent and crosses behind her. Her torso is flexed strongly backward, as is her head, which also turns to the proper right in a pose of ecstasy. The face is round, the cheeks are full, and her expression is smiling; her tresses, parted into two bands on her forehead, are drawn back onto the nape of her neck in a broad cluster of hair, falling in compact locks onto her shoulders.¹ Following her sinuous movement, her long, high-waisted chiton clings to her body; emphasizing her prominent breasts and buttocks, the garment falls in broad, soft folds. The base is an irregularly shaped oval, on the left side of which is a vent hole.

The figure is characterized by a pronounced flexing of the torso and by a dynamic rhythm that develops progressively from the raised left heel toward the top of the figure. This sort of weighting is found also in many figures of females dancers discovered among the funerary deposits of the Early Hellenistic period from Magna Graecia and Sicily, where dance and music played a prominent role in Dionysian cult contexts as well in rites of passage from childhood to adolescence.²

Dancers and female musicians with lyres and kitharas are particularly well represented in the funerary deposits of Taranto, Lipari, and Centuripe, generally dating from the third century or second century BC.³ Such figures are presented in poses similar to that of the Getty's dancer, that is, characterized by sinuous rhythms and by a new spatial construction of the figure developed in coeval statuary of the Early Hellenistic period.⁴ The presence of music in the funerary context is well documented by finds of these instruments in tomb contexts in Athens and in funerary deposits in Locri, Taranto, and Paestum in Magna Graecia.⁵ Such dancer and musician typologies are also well attested in the Hellenistic period at Priene, Myrina, Pergamon, and Cyrene, where they were produced up until the first century BC; the latter cities were involved in an especially intense exchange of motifs and iconographies with Magna Graecia in which, at least in the third century BC, Taranto seems to have played an especially active role.⁶

The presence of the cradle kithara—a typically female instrument due to its small size and its high-pitched sound—in combination with the theatrical type of chiton—high-belted, light, with short sleeves, which in other typologies may be accompanied by a himation wrapped around the arms or on the hips—can be traced to the iconography of the Muse, which seems to have been the inspiration for this figure.⁷ In gems as well as terracottas, it is possible to

find a number of comparisons for the Muse playing an instrument, though the schemes tend to be different: in fact, it is more common to see the instrument carried on the torso or to one side, rather than over the shoulder. Sometimes the kithara is set on a small pillar, or the figure might be resting a foot on a rocky rise, or playing in a seated position.⁸ The scheme of this statue, with the kithara set on the left shoulder—a position that accentuates the arched back and markedly emphasizes the pelvis, creating an almost grotesque deformation of the figure—is therefore unusual.⁹

In the absence of reliable information on the object's findspot, it is difficult to identify the figure with any precision. Stylistically, it is reminiscent of a number of examples from Centuripe datable to between the end of the third century and the beginning of the second century BC.¹⁰

Notes

1. For the hairstyle, see the small heads from the late third century BC from Morgantina, in BELL 1981, nos. 608, 611, pl. 104.
2. On the role of music in funerary contexts, see BESCHI 1991 and the bibliography already cited for Orpheus group (cat. 1–3) and cat. 13, n. 4.
3. See the statuette of a female dancer at cat. 36. For the finds in Taranto, see GRAEPLER 1997, pp. 205–12, fig. 183 from Tomb 15 of Phase E (175–125 BC); GRAEPLER 1984, pp. 284–87, pl. XXXI, no. 2. See also the statuette with a flexed torso and raised hands, possibly from Taranto, and dating from the third century BC in BESQUES 1986, pl. 37c. From the necropolis of Arpi come two statuettes of maenads comparable to this one; see M. Mazza, *Testimonianze coroplastiche della Daunia nel Museo di Foggia* (Foggia, 1979), p. 14, fig. 3. See also the group of statuettes of dancers and musicians from the necropolis of Lipari that can be linked to Middle Comedy, and which present similarities to this figure in the pose and the clinging costume, as do types F10 and F14 in BERNABÒ BREA 1981, pp. 110–14. For statuettes with kithara from Sicily of the fourth to third century BC, see A. Bellia, *Coroplastica con raffigurazioni musicali nella Sicilia greca (secolo VI–III a.C.)* (Pisa and Rome, 2009), pp. 165–66, with examples from the necropoleis in Marsala, from the sacred area of San Nicola in Agrigento, and from Monte Sant'Angelo in Licata. For similar types from the funerary deposits of Centuripe, see MUSUMECI 2010, p. 47, nos. 18, 22; p. 65, no. 108 of the second half of the third century BC. See also the dancers in similar poses in SCHÜRMANN 1989, no. 797, assignable to the first half of the second century BC, and in KEKULÉ 1884, pl. XLIV, no. 2–3 (also from Centuripe); the statuette of a dancer in the Museo Civico “Antonio Collisani” in Petralia Sottana (Sicily), in H. P. Isler and M. Sguaitamatti, *Die Sammlung Collisani* (Kilchberg, 1990), no. 125, dating from the end of the third century BC; two statuettes of dancers from Gela, dating from the second half of the fourth century BC, with emphatic poses, in BERNABÒ BREA 2002, figs. 68–69; a female player from the third century, from Lilibeo, now in the Museo Archeologico Regionale di Palermo (N. I. 1315). For the pose, see also the dancer from the middle of the third century BC in F. W. Hamdorf, ed., *Hauch des Prometheus: Meisterwerke in Ton* (Munich, 1996), pp. 111–13, fig. 140; see also the fragment of appliqué with a maenad from the third century, from Palestrina (Praeneste), in PENSABENE 2001, no. 61, pl. 118.
4. See, for example, the type of the “Berlin Dancer,” attributable to Lysippos and assigned to 323–17 BC: R. Cittadini, “Prassilla a Sicione,” in MORENO 1995, pp. 208–17.
5. For the presence of lyres and kitharas in funerary iconography, see also L. Todisco, “Nuovi dati e osservazioni sulla ‘Tomba delle Danzatrici’ di Ruvo di Puglia,” *AttiMGrecia* ser. 3, no. 3 (1994–95), pp. 119–42.
6. For the figures of women playing stringed instruments in Pergamon, see E. Topperwein, *Terrakotten von Pergamon*, *Pergamenische Forschungen* 3 (Berlin, 1976), nos. 171–73, fig. 27. For the three-dimensional and transparent rendering of

the chiton, see also a dancer from Cyrene (200 BC) in BURN AND HIGGINS 2001, no. 2724. Also from Cyrenaica are the dancers in BESQUES 1992, pl. 26c–f, from the middle and the second half of the third century BC; from Athens, a statuette of a Muse with kithara and plectrum in WALTERS 1903, C20, pl. XXIV; see also the statuette of a girl with phorminx, from the necropolis of Thebes, from the end of the fourth century or the third century BC, in JEAMMET 2003b, p. 228, no. 169. On relations between Sicily, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Hellenistic towns, see GRAEPLER 1996, esp. p. 236; and R. A. Higgins, “Tarantine Terracottas,” in *Taranto nella civiltà della Magna Grecia, Atti Taranto 10, 1970* (Naples, 1971) pp. 267–82, esp. pp. 273–74. On such relations with special attention to the polychrome vases of Centuripe, see E. Joly, “Teorie vecchie e nuove sulla ceramica policroma di Centuripe,” in *Philias charin: Miscellanea di studi classici in onore di Eugenio Manni* (Rome, 1980), vol. 4, pp. 1241–54.

7. On the iconography of the Muses in the Hellenistic period, see L. Faedo, s.v. “Mousa, Mousai,” *LIMC* 7, suppl. (1994), pp. 991–1013. On differences among the various stringed instruments, and in particular among lyra, chelys-lyra, and cradle kithara, see M. Maas and J. M. Snyder, *Stringed Instruments of Ancient Greece* (New Haven and London, 1989), pp. 165–75; M. Maas and J. McIntosh Snyder, “Strumenti a corde per dei e mortali,” in D. Restani, ed., *Musica e mito nella Grecia antica* (Bologna, 1995), pp. 63–75, fig. 4; D. Paquette, *L'instrument de musique dans la céramique de la Grèce antique: Études d'organologie* (Paris, 1984), pp. 131–34. See also, for the Dionysian instruments, A. Bélis, “Musica e ‘trance’ nel corteggio dionisiaco,” in Restani, ed., *Musica e mito nella Grecia antica* (op. cit.), pp. 271–87.
8. For the various iconographic schemes, see L. Faedo, s.v. “Mousa, Mousai,” *LIMC* 7, suppl. (1994), nos. 162–63, 179, 181–84, 205, 221. The position of the figure with torso bent backward is also comparable to that of a female figure incised in a ring, in G. M. A. Richter, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Handbook of the Greek Collection* (New York, 1973), fig. 126, and to a figure with chiton, head turned to the left, and with a lyre in the left hand, dating from the fourth century BC, in idem., *Engraved Gems of the Greeks and the Etruscans* (London, 1968), no. 538, p. 141; for other comparisons, see M.-L. Vollenweider, *Deliciae Leonis: Antike geschnittene Steine und Ringe aus einer Privatsammlung* (Mainz am Rhein, 1984), no. 92 (fragment of an onyx cameo with a figure of a dancing maenad); also see the cameo from the Roman era in **LA MUSIQUE ET LA DANSE** 1996, no. 112.
9. A Muse in a more emphatic pose can be seen in a gem dating from the last third of the first century BC with a figure in profile playing the kithara; this figure shares with the current statuette the torso flexing backward, the tilted head, and the left leg drawn back, but the instrument is held in front. See J. Lancha, s.v. “Mousa/Mousae,” *LIMC* 7, suppl. (1994), p. 1021, no. 63.
10. The type seems also to include elements of both caricature and realism that might have reflected tastes of Alexandrian inspiration attested in Sicily and Magna Graecia. The grotesque deformations seem to be reminiscent as well of the steatopygic female figures of Alexandrian inspiration: see R. Paribeni, “Ariccia: Rilievo con scene egizie,” *NSc* (1919), pp. 106–12; E. van’t Dack, “Les relations entre l’Égypte ptolémaïque et l’Italie,” in E. van’t Dack, P. van Dessel, and W. van Gucht, eds., *Egypt and the Hellenistic World: Proceedings of the International Colloquium, Leuven, 24–26 May 1982* (Leuven, 1983), pp. 383–406.