


32

Statuette of Eros with a Deer

325-250 BC

[Expand All](#)

Object Details

Catalogue Number	32
Inventory Number	71.AD.137 
Typology	Statuette
Location	Taranto region
Dimensions	H: 14.3 cm; W (base): 11 cm

Fabric

Light beige in color (Munsell 10 yr 8/4), porous and friable, with small and intermittent reflective inclusions; in a number of points, the fabric presents an orange color (Munsell 5 yr 7/8), with calcareous inclusions. The polychromy has been preserved in a number of areas, laid over a layer of white slip: pink (wings), purple (hair, complexion, and animal fur), and black (sections of background). The front part was made with a simple mold; the back part, not modeled, features a circular vent hole. The wings and tail were applied to the figure before firing; a number of details, such as the deer's rear hoof, were retouched by hand.

Condition

Partially reassembled from numerous fragments; there are many gaps in both the back and the front sections.

Provenance

– Robert Hecht (Rome, Italy); 1971, Royal Athena Galleries (New York, New York), sold to the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1971.

Bibliography

SELECTED WORKS 1971, no. 61; HERMARY AND CASSIMATIS 1986, p. 873, no. 236.

Description

The little Eros is resting its weight on its bent left leg while its right leg is extended to one side; with both arms it embraces the neck of a deer, which rests its muzzle on the Eros's left cheek. The Eros's head is tilted slightly while its shoulders are turned toward the animal. The face is plump; the eyes are round with indications of pupils; the mouth is fleshy; the hair cascades down onto the shoulders in wavy locks and is woven into a braid from the center of the forehead backward. The Eros is dressed only in a chlamys fastened on the right shoulder with a circular clasp; his feet are shod with sandals. The Eros's wings are spread. The front of the fat body is naked and folds of flesh are indicated on the inner thighs and abdomen. The figures are set upon a low, hollow, parallelepiped-shaped base.

The child Eros is found throughout coroplastic production in southern Italy mostly from the second half of the fourth century BC. It was probably derived from Greek models and adapted for the needs of local worship.¹ The type covered only with a chlamys, which is quite common, is accompanied by attributes that allude to the multiplicity of functions that the figure of the Eros could perform. When found accompanied by an animal in South Italy, this type is primarily associated with funerary deposits, as is the case in Taranto and Metaponto.² The subject can also take on other meanings in connection with the sphere of Aphrodite, mystery and Dionysian cults, or rites of passage from childhood to youth. In the absence of a specific context, however, these references must remain merely speculative.³

The type can be dated between the end of the fourth century and the first half of the third century BC on the basis of stylistic comparisons with statuettes originating from datable contexts. Although a Sicilian findspot has been proposed, the type also has affinities with Tarentine pieces.⁴

Notes

1. On the iconography of the Eros and the multiple meanings attached to the image, see HERMARY AND CASSIMATIS 1986, pp. 939–41.
2. In terracotta figurines, Eros is more commonly accompanied by piglets, dolphins, or birds. For the association of Eros with cervids, see HERMARY AND CASSIMATIS 1986, pp. 872–73. For the type of an Eros embracing the neck of an animal, see BELL 1981, no. 322, pl. 70 (a late example dated to the middle of the first century BC). On the presence of Eros statuettes in tombs, see HERMARY AND CASSIMATIS 1986, p. 941, and the examples in GRAEPLER 1997, pp. 210–12, 228–231, figs. 216, 218, 261; in this funerary context, Erotes with kitharai and amphorai can be associated with other statuettes that have links to the

Dionysian sphere, such as maenads. For Metaponto, see F. G. Lo Porto, "Metaponto: Rinvenimenti nella città antica e nel suo territorio," *NSc* 42-43 (1988-89), pp. 374-75 (child's tombs, datable to the second half of the fourth century BC).

3. For the association between Eros and mystery cults, see D. B. Thompson, *Troy: The Terracotta Figurines of the Hellenistic Period*, Suppl. Monograph 3 (Princeton, 1963), pp. 137-39; A. Bottini, "Appunti sulla presenza di Dionysos nel mondo italico," in BERTI 1991, pp. 157-70; and see, in more general terms, C. Beer, "Comparative Votive Religion: The Evidence of Children in Cyprus, Greece and Etruria," in LINDERS AND NORDQUIST 1987, pp. 21-29.
4. See GRAEPLER 1997, esp. fig. 261; there are other significant comparisons in BREITENSTEIN 1941, no. 725, pl. 87; for the pose, see also the Eros with a cart, originally from Nola and datable to the third century BC, in BESQUES 1986, pl. 14e.