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# Miniature Altar with Animal Combat

LATE SIXTH-EARLY FIFTH CENTURIES BC

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## Object Details

<b>Catalogue Number</b>	50
Inventory Number	77.AD.122 
Typology	Altar
Location	South Italy
<b>Dimensions</b>	H: 4.9 cm; L: 14.1 cm; D: 6.4 cm

## Fabric

Orange in color (Munsell 2.5 yr 7/6), with small reflective inclusions; the surface is covered by a thick whitish slip. Intermittent traces of red pigment on the cornices and on the front, and black pigment on the small palm tree.

## Condition

Partially reassembled from five fragments; part of the front section is preserved, as well as part of the upper surface, one of the short sides, and a small fragment of the back section.

## Provenance

– 1977, Joel Kass (Culver City, California), donated to the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1971.

## Bibliography

Unpublished.

## Description

The *arula* is of the type shaped like a parallelepiped box, open on the bottom and decorated with reliefs on both of the long sides. On the front, in a heraldic arrangement, two facing felines sink their fangs into an animal, perhaps a deer, which is looking backward; its legs have already collapsed beneath it. The scene is bounded on the left by a small palmette, which no doubt once had a mate in a symmetrical position at the other extremity. On the corresponding long side, only the upper fragment of a palmette is preserved. The felines are shown in silhouette, with their muzzles seen frontally; they are gripping the animal by the neck and the rump; the bodies are slender, but the mold is worn and the details of the animals' muzzles and anatomy are obscured.

The upper side is smooth, and the decorated sides are framed by a flat cornice above and below. The *arula* was assembled from individual panels, joined together with barbotine; the joining points have been smoothed with a spatula.<sup>1</sup> The lively original polychromy is now almost entirely gone; all that remains are traces of red pigment on the cornices and some black pigment on the palm tree.

This altar type, narrow and elongate in shape with scenes of fighting felines, is reminiscent of *arulae* from Locri and especially from Caulonia, where they are found in great numbers, especially in domestic settings.<sup>2</sup> The *arulae* from the Achaean colony, exported to Locri or reproduced there from molds primarily coming from Caulonia, stand out for their smaller size relative to Locrian types, and for their surface color, which in the latter is pinkish. After the Locrian types, they were the most common types in Magna Graecia, where there was a notable receptivity toward iconographic motifs drawn from the Ionic tradition, often modified to suit local tastes. In Sicily, too, beginning in the Archaic period, *arulae* with a zoomachia (animal combat) have been found at Lipari,<sup>3</sup> Agrigento, Heraclea Minoa, Gela, Monte Saraceno, Himera, Solunto, Zankle, Paternò, and Mozia.<sup>4</sup>

This motif remained in use for a very long time with only slight modifications, such as the type of animals and the composition; new molds were taken from the existing ones, so that dating is especially difficult if there is no accurate context for the excavation. Relying strictly upon a stylistic analysis and comparison with types from contexts that provide better chronological definition, the type (A 3 I) can be bracketed between the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the fifth century BC.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. For the type, fabrication technique, and polychromy, see M. Rubinich, "Arule con zoomachia," in BARRA BAGNASCO 1989, pp. 53–129, esp. pp. 53–62, and for Caulonia, SIMONETTI 2002.
2. For the *arulae* of Caulonia, see also MEIJDEN 1993, pp. 38–45, pls. 28, 32, 33; H. Tréziny, *Kaulonia: Sondage sur la fortification nord, 1982–1985* (Naples 1989), no. 353, figs. 51, 54; P. Orsi, "Caulonia," *MonAnt* 23 (1914), figs. 25, 30, 31 (*arulae* found in residential contexts); M. Rubinich, "Arule con zoomachia," in BARRA BAGNASCO 1989, pp. 53–129, esp. cat. 153, pl. XXVI, pp. 121–22; also in Rubinich, in the Caulonian type of Locri, a plant element appears at the far end of the field, no. 149, pl. XXV.
3. U. Spigo, "Alcune note sulla plastica arcaica e del V secolo a.C. dal Bothros di Eolo," in L. Bernabò Brea and M. Cavalier, eds., *Meligunis Lipára, 9. Topografia di Lipari in età greca e romana* (Palermo, 1998), pp. 415–16, pl. XIIIc–e. Compare also with the examples from Zankle (Messina), *ibid.*, p. 416, n. 33.
4. For Agrigento, see P. Marconi, *Agrigento: Topografia ed arte* (Florence, 1929), p. 191, fig. 131; for Heraclea Minoa, see E. De Miro, "Eraclea Minoa: Scavi eseguiti negli anni 1955/56/57," *NSc* 12 (1958), pp. 243–57. For Gela, see A. M. Bisi, "Motivi sicelioti nell'arte punica di età ellenistica," *ArchCl* 18 (1966), pp. 41–53; for Monte Saraceno, see E. De Miro, "Ricerche a Monte Saraceno presso Ravanusa," *Quaderni della ricerca scientifica* 112 (Rome, 1985), pp. 149–66; for Himera, see BELVEDERE 1982, pp. 90–91, pl. XVII, nos. 1–2; for Zankle, see G. Tigano, "Un'arula con zoomachia da Messina," in *ARCHEOLOGIA DEL MEDITERRANEO* \* 2003, pp. 665–70; for Solunto, see V. Giustolisi, "Nuovi elementi per l'identificazione della Solunto di Tucide," *\*Kokalos* 16 (1970), pp. 144–65, esp. pl. XIII, fig. 2 (larger *arula*, assignable to the fifth century BC). For Paternò: C. Ciurcina, "Arule con scene di zoomachia," in LENTINI 1993, p. 41.
5. See SIMONETTI 2002, pp. 362–66 (type A 3 I).