

A small jug from Karnobat with images of Thracian warriors

Rumyana Georgieva

The object of this article is an Attic red-figure jug dated to late third quarter of the 5th century BC, found in a tumulus destroyed by treasure hunters near the town of Karnobat. The vessel is made of fine clay, pale red tinted after the firing. The glaze is thick, black and shiny. The shape is typical for the local pottery and finds many parallels among the pottery from the Thracian cemeteries.

The figural composition decorates the conical part of the jug. It consists of three figures: a warrior-horseman and a couple of foot soldiers. They are depicted running to the right; their clothes and armory are typical for the Thracians. The typical Thracian ζειρά is thrown on their shoulders. They wear tight-fitting boots (ἐμβάδες) made of deerskin on their feet. Their hats are pointed and are made of fox fur (ὀλωπεκίς). The warriors are armed with a couple of spears; one of the foot soldiers and the horseman carry crescent shaped shields (πέλτη).

There is no doubt that the depicted men are Thracians. It is indicated by the typical clothes and arms as well as by the picture itself, familiar from another find, which is of undoubtedly Thracian origin: a small red-figure jug from Apollonia Pontica, considered by A. Lezzi-Hafter as an Eretria Painter's work dating to 425 BC. The existence of the same composition on both vases could be explained by at least three possible versions:

- initially, one of the vases was made; later on the second jug was copied or made from memory either in the same atelier or somewhere else and it was made either by the first painter or by another one for new customer;

- Either both vases or one after another were painted according to a client's commission by the same painter or it was done by two differ-

ent painters for two different customers;

- In the same atelier, in a certain period (and maybe for a special occasion) several vases decorated with this composition were made.

All these versions are possible since the vessel shape and the subject matter are to the Thracian taste, and both jugs were found in the Black Sea region, an area closely related to the trade with goods coming from the Greek world. Without challenging the Eretria Painter's authorship, we could suggest that the paintings on both vases were made in the same atelier by two painters (master and apprentice?) who belonged to the same artistic circle.

It is worth pointing out that the warriors are depicted ready to fight and with arms typical for various military branches: a peltast, an acontist, a warrior with a short spear, and a horseman with a knife, a couple of long spears and a pelta (shield). They are depicted hurrying, crossing a mountain (the jug from Apollonia), which might mean that they are going to an assembly or a decisive battle. For that reason it is possible that the composition has been an echo of a legend (e.g. the participation of king Rezos in the Trojan war) or a real event from the second half of the 5th century BC (the military campaign of the Odrysian ruler Sitalkes to Chalcidice and Macedonia), related to the participation or the victory of Thracians in a battle and found response both within the territory of the Thracian tribes and outside it. It is suggested that the increased interest towards the Thracian military power and the Thracian heroic past related to a particular event resulted in the vase painting and for a short period, according to a special commission or because of the great demand, a number of such painted jugs were produced.