

ARYBALLOS WITH TWO CONFRONTED ROOSTERS

Corinthian Ceramics

H: 14.6 cm

Reference: 20349



The vase thrown on the wheel was made from a good quality, well-purified yellow clay. The round body is supported by wide and flat base providing a small annular foot; the discoid board surmounts a small cylindrical neck; the banded handle is placed vertically. The decoration executed in the black-figure technique is based on the generous employment of incision lines which render with precision a quantity of details of the anatomy of birds and vegetal patterns, and subsidiary. The painting is dark-brown and black with several parts of the decoration painted in added purple.

The aryballos, which form is seemed to be inspired by Sub-Mycenaean and Geometric tradition, is one of the major appearances in the formal Corinthian repertoire: its commonness and the study of its evolution constitute one of the foundations to establish the chronology of the entire corpus of Corinthian pottery. The Corinthian aryballoi, which were especially in fashion between the 7th and first half of the 6th century B.C., can have different profiles (piriform-conical, spherical, with the flat and annular base) and have dimensions as between four/five centimeters high in the smallest examples, while the largest would reach about twenty centimeters. Because of its large scale, wide base, and rich decoration, the present piece is certainly to be dated to the stylistic phase called the Middle Corinthian, which was developed during the first decades of the 6th century B.C.

The painted scene, which occupies practically the entire available space, is designed around the prominent vegetal motif in the center composed of lotus-and-palmette escutcheon. The head-to-tail arrangement and asymmetrical dimensions (the lower part is bigger) follow the shape of the bodies of two opposed roosters painted on both halves of the vessel. The roosters represented in profile are shown standing in the relaxing position; their ample and rounded forms are well-adapted to the curving profile of the vase. The arrangement and type of incisions characterize the bird's feathers on the neck, wings, and tail with great precision and realism. In a kind of the horror vacui,

typical for the Corinthian pottery, the surface is filled with the additional motives which often take form of different types of rosettes.

In ancient Greek culture, the rooster symbolizes often the military bravery and courage as this animal never hesitates of fighting; however, the way the feathery creatures are painted here, nothing is to think of their eventual fight. The presence of these two roosters, most probably, should be connected with two typical phenomena of the Archaic Greek society: from one part, the development of sport activities provided with many places reserved for athletic practices as palestrae (an aryballos is a vase for the ointment containing perfumed oils used by the athletes for the hygienic reasons), and on the other, there was an accepted erotic behavior regarding the relations between an adult man (erastes) and a boy (eromenos). As it is presented in the contemporary Attic iconography, a rooster, the same thing as a small game (hair, fox, deer, or different kinds of birds), is presented among specifically erotic gifts which the erastes used to seduce his beloved. The aryballos, a cosmetic vase, was an appropriate piece in the setting of predilection such as palestrae and gymnasia, where the meetings between the partners usually took place.

This present aryballos is certainly a product of the workshop of the Otterlo Painter (the artist specialized in the decoration of aryballoi with plane background, who worked at the beginning of the 6th century B.C.); it was recently reattributed to the Wieler Painter, who was one of the collaborators most close to this workshop.

CONDITION

Complete; several cracks and small scratches on surface; painting is erased and peeled in some places; the purple color is washed away; no traces of the white; two holes for taking of samples for the thermoluminescence test below the base and neck near the handle; there are three old labels on the underside: a circular label inscribed in

black ink "824" (underlined), a circular label printed with the name "Alexis Quart" around a heraldic motif, and a scalloped circular label printed "Douane Centrale – Exportation – Paris."

PROVENANCE

Ex- old US private collection, acquired in Paris in the early 20th century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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