

BAND CUP WITH A DIONYSIAC SCENE (PAINTER OF THE AGORA P1241)

Greek, ca. 550-530 B.C.

Ceramic

Diam: 21.8 cm

Reference: 5875



This cup is decorated in the so-called black-figure technique, with added purple and white color (especially for the skin of the female figures). Incised lines indicate anatomical and clothing details. The black paint still retains its original metallic and glossy luster; the lighter shades on the surface probably result from a problem during the firing process. This type of cup is known as a band cup; it is characterized by a thick black line that covers the lip and the body of the vessel. The figural decoration is limited to a light band situated between the two handles, in which the figures are painted in miniature size (such cups are termed the "Little Masters" series), according to a style introduced in the 7th century B.C. by Corinthian potters for the decoration of small perfume vases. The scenes painted on both sides of the vessel are nearly identical. At the center is a twisted vine tree with many branches from which hang leaves and eight bunches of grapes. Two maenads, seemingly lost in an ecstatic dance (they run, turn back and perform ample moves), frame the plant decoration. They are dressed in long chitons covered with animal skins (panther?). Taking into account the gestures of the maenads, who look surprised and almost frightened, it is possible that the branch suddenly sprung out of the earth, as an epiphany or an anodos of the god of wine, Dionysos, appearing in front of his acolytes. The figural compositions are framed by a pattern of palmettes and spirals at the handles. In Greek mythology, the maenads (*Μαινάδες*, from *μαινομαι* meaning to rave), or Bacchantes, are the female followers of Dionysus. They may have a divine or human origin; the first maenads were originally the nymphs who fed Dionysus in his childhood. As female counterparts of the satyrs they accompany in orgiastic or Dionysiac processions, the maenads may carry a thyrsus, a kantharos, or a flute as an attribute. Their sexual exploits and frenzied dances are reproduced by human Bacchantes, the women who take part in the cults of Dionysus, like the famous Bacchantes of Euripides who were driven mad by the deity and blinded to the point that they no longer recognized their children. The link between this cup and the work of the Painter of the Agora P1241 was established by Pieter

Heesen and is justified for stylistic and thematic reasons. Dionysiac scenes including processions of satyrs and maenads, as well as vine branches, are a favorite subject of the Painter of the Agora P1241; besides, only band cups were attributed to him. This artist's work is somewhat mechanical and repetitive, but his artistic qualities fit in line with the average of his Attic contemporaries, as attested, in this cup, by the symmetry between the representations on both sides and, mostly, by the many details that embellish the grape branches, the chitons and the skins of the maenads.

CONDITION

Complete and virtually intact; minor chips on the foot and lip. Painting slightly flaking in places.

PROVENANCE

Ex-Jean-Marie Talleux Collection, Grand-Fort-Philippe, France; Hotel Drouot, Paris, December 6-7, 1995, lot 256.

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