

Attic Black Figure Amphora, 6th Century B.C., height 21½ in., Felton Bequest, 1957.

TWO NEW GREEK VASES

The Felton Bequest has this year acquired another two outstanding examples of Greek pottery, admirably illustrating the skill of the vase-painter at one of the periods of his highest achievement and also providing most interesting counterparts to the two vases purchased in 1956.

The first is an Attic black-figure amphora (inv. 1729/4), 21½ inches in height, intact, and remarkably well preserved, the added white and red being unusually fresh and giving to the vase something of the appearance of classical four-colour painting, with the warm orange-yellow of the clay and the lustrous black of the background. The shape, with flanged handles decorated with ivy, combines strength with refinement and is well adapted to the representation of panel scenes. The two depicted on this vase contrast the tragic outcome of war with the quiet joys of peace — one showing Ajax carrying the dead body of Achilles from the battle, the other a wedding procession.

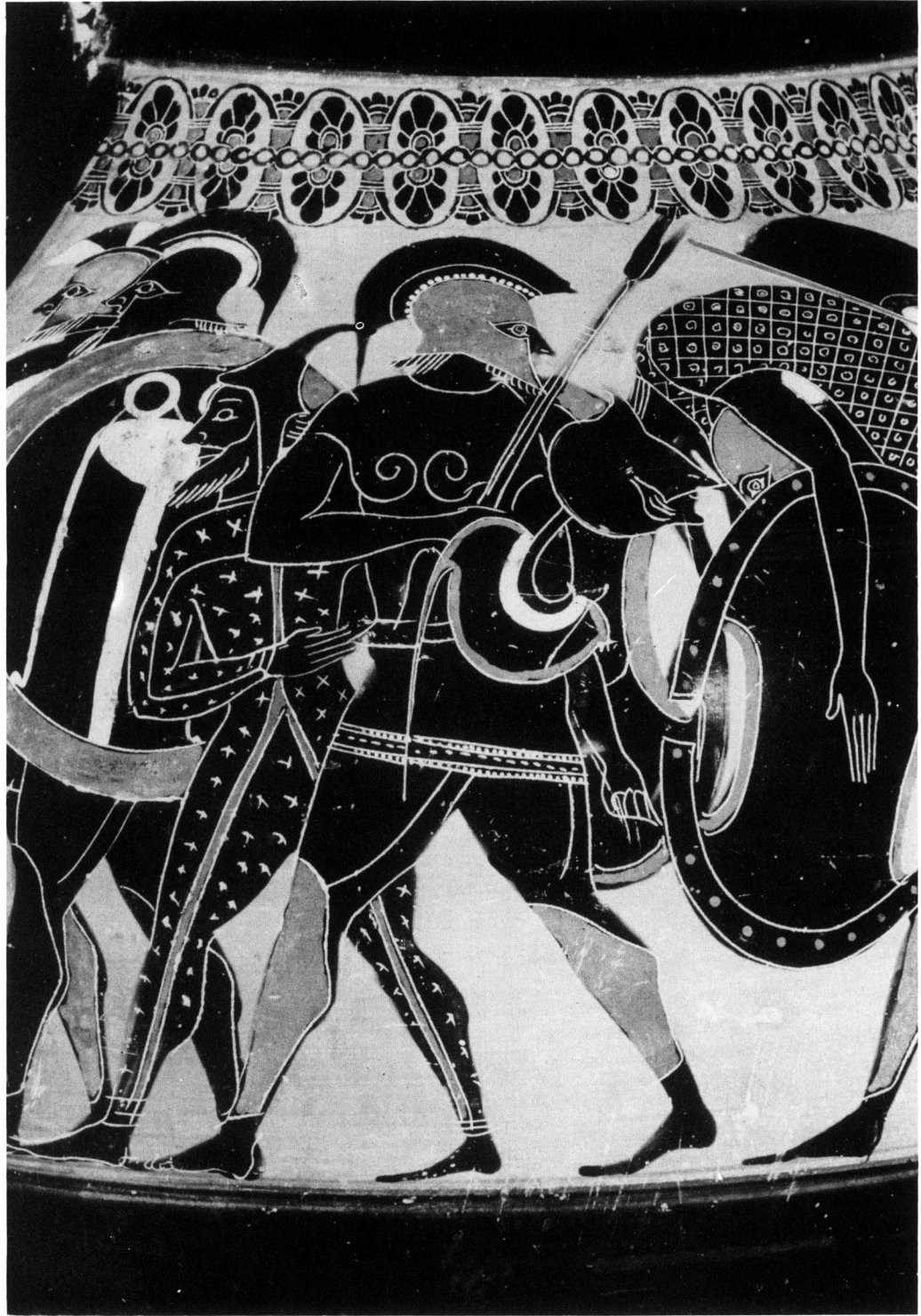
The obverse is beautifully composed with a strong forward movement from right to left. The subject is taken from one of the poems of the epic cycle, the *Aithiopis*, which tells some of the later episodes of the Trojan War, including the death of Achilles and the rescue of his body by Ajax. In the centre of the scene is Ajax with Achilles on his shoulders: he advances slowly, "straining beneath the weight of giant limbs," and over his shoulders slumps down the limp body of the dead hero in full armour. In front is a group of four warriors — three are Greeks, with crested helmets, shields and greaves, the nearest of whom turns his head back to look at the central group; the other, of smaller stature, is an archer in Oriental costume — sleeves, trousers and pointed hat with long ear-flaps — one of the Greeks' allies, whose presence adds a little touch of variety. To right is another group of three warriors, advancing side by side, holding large round shields, one of which has three dolphins as a blazon. Immediately behind Ajax, turning round to look at the advancing trio, is a woman, her hand raised to her head in the conventional gesture of mourning — probably it is Briseis, the handmaid of Achilles.

On the other side the action moves from left to right with an effect not unlike that of a frieze on a temple. A wedding procession is depicted — the bride and groom in a four-horse chariot, accompanied by a group of maidens with offerings. Such scenes appear quite frequently on vases of this period, but few give so full a rendering. Behind the chariot stands a bearded man, with a red-striped and rosette-embroidered cloak; he is the groomsman, and on this occasion the presence of an ivy-wreath around his head suggests that it is the god Dionysus himself. Next the happy couple in the chariot, both in festive garb — she wearing a veil and holding a lotus-bud, he with neatly trimmed hair, grasping the reins firmly in both hands. Behind the chariot are four maidens — two carry hydriai (water-jugs) on their heads, and two flat basket-like objects, probably sieves, the emblems of household industry. In front of the horses is a man with a pointed hat, striped cloak and high boots — possibly Hermes himself come to conduct the couple to their new home.

In shape and style the Melbourne amphora must be associated with the vases which group around the greatest master of the black-figure style, the painter Exekias. It is not by his own hand, but it stands very near to him and reflects his influence, and is the work of a distinguished artist who also painted an amphora in Naples (Santangelo 38) with chariot scenes very similar to the one on our vase.

With two excellent examples of the Chalcidian and the Attic black-figure styles together in the same gallery it is interesting to note some of the points of contrast between them. Both are similar in shape, though the Chalcidian is a little earlier, with a rather fuller and heavier body, less ovoid than the Attic, which has a rather longer neck. The manner of decoration is the same in both, but in the former the composition is more open, with figures moving in from both sides, against the closed, processional style of the latter. There is perhaps a greater verve, a more robust sense of life and movement about the Chalcidian, which one sees in both the horses and the warriors, as against the quieter and more reflective mood of the Attic, with its precise and polished drawing, which, together with a more effective use of added colour, gives it perhaps the more enduring charm. It well reflects the high level of cultural and artistic achievement in Athens at the time of Pisistratus, and must be dated to the decade preceding his death in 527 B.C.

Towards the end of his reign (ca. 530 B.C.) took place the momentous change from the black-figure technique to the red. In black-figure the design was painted on to the clay in black silhouettes, enlivened by incised lines for details and by the use of added white or



Ajax with Achilles on his Shoulder, detail from Attic Black Figure Amphora, Felton Bequest 1957.



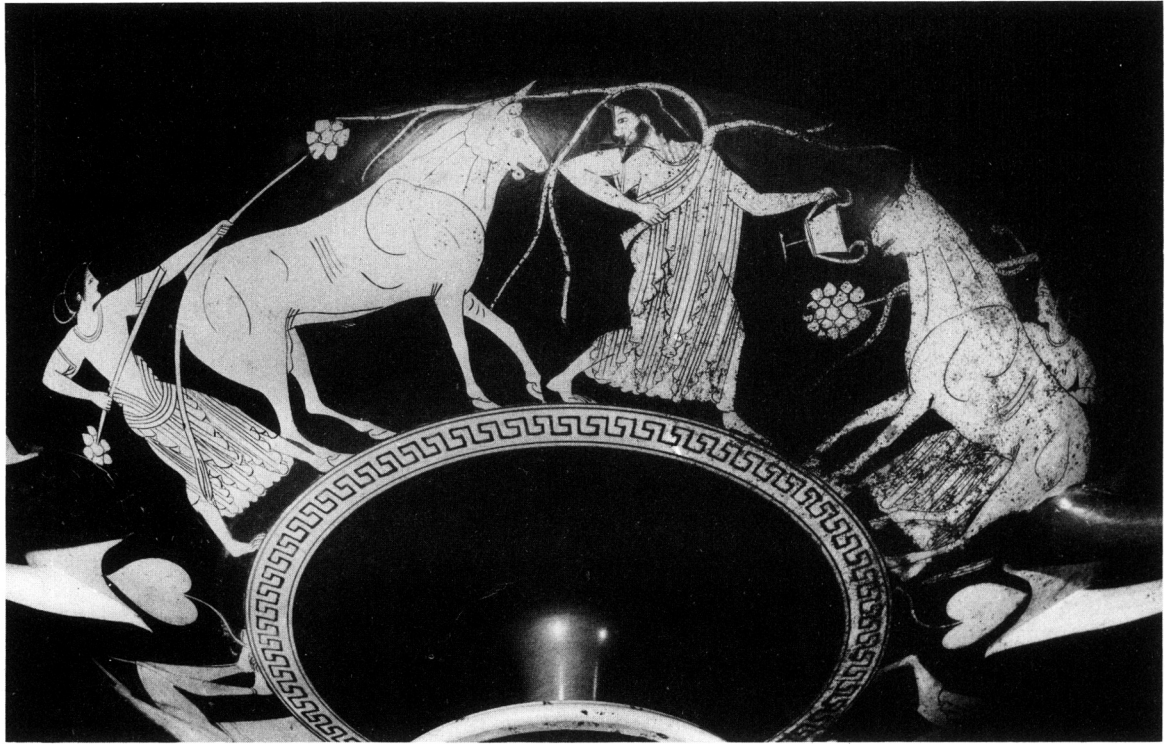
Heracles and the Giant Alkyoneus, detail from Attic Red Figure Cup, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ ins. diam., 6th century B.C., Felton Bequest 1957.

red; in the new style the figures are reserved in the red of the clay with details drawn in a diluted form of the glaze which provides the black background, and with a much more sparing use of accessory colours. Both techniques continue side by side — sometimes on the same vase — for many years, but the better painters of the late sixth century B.C. are more attracted to red-figure which offered greater freedom for drawing and wider possibilities of expression. Many painters and potters worked in both styles, among the latter Pamphaios, who is closely associated with the workshop of Nicosthenes, and from whose hand as potter we possess over 40 signed vases. He is therefore a figure of some importance in the early history of red-figure and the acquisition of a new cup bearing his signature and in an unusually fine state of preservation is an event of some importance.

The Felton cup (inv. 1730/4) is 5 inches high, with a diameter of 16 inches including the handles, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches without them. The shape is the standard form of Attic red-figure cup, in which lip, bowl and stem form a continuous curve, the beauty of which makes this particular shape one of the most attractive ever to emerge from the potters' hands. This is perhaps the explanation of its lasting popularity, for a comparison with the Splanchnopt Painter's cup some fifty years later will show the shapes to be almost the same. The clay is pinkish-buff; the firing was very uneven, and the black applied rather thinly, with the result that much of it has turned to red through being left too long in the re-oxidising fire, or else has become rather patchy.

Round the rim of the foot runs the signature *Pamphaios epoiesen*, which signifies that Pamphaios was the potter who made the vase. There are other letters inscribed on both the interior and exterior, but they appear to be meaningless and serve only for decorative purposes.

In the tondo of the interior is depicted a bearded silen holding a full wineskin in front of him; he is moving to left, with his head turned back in the other direction. Behind his right leg is a thyrsus. The artist has accomplished with masterly ability the by no means easy task of filling a circle, at the same time endowing his composition with a profound sense of strength and vigour.



The Cattle of Geryon, detail from Attic Red Figure Cup, Felton Bequest 1957.

On the exterior is one of the best extant representations of the legend of Heracles and the giant Alkyoneus, who tended the cattle of Geryon. He was invincible, and so, at the behest of Athena, Hypnos was sent to put him to sleep to give Heracles the opportunity of slaying him. The outstretched body of the giant occupies the main part of one side of the vase; above him, his mission performed, squats the little winged figure of the sleep god. The face of Alkyoneus is very expressively drawn, with a wrinkled brow, as if the giant is slightly puzzled at his fate, tightly-closed eyes with long lashes, a bristly moustache and a faint smile playing about his lips. To left is Hermes, then Heracles, with the traditional lion-skin over his head and shoulders, stealing up on the sleeping giant with drawn sword and a look of happy expectation in his eye. From the right comes his champion Athena, with a shawl-like aegis over her long tunic, wearing a helmet and carrying a spear. Finally, seated on an altar, with his back to the whole proceedings, is a warrior — probably Telamon, who was with Heracles on this occasion, but seems to be playing a very passive part. Below each handle is a heart-shaped ivy leaf in red, and on the other side appear two oxen, part of the herd tended by the giant, with Dionysus and two maenads. The cattle are pleasingly drawn in a rather stylised but decorative fashion, and beside each animal is a maenad carrying a thyrsus and wearing a short-sleeved tunic, with a cloak draped about the lower half of her body to fall in a cascade of neat folds. In the centre is Dionysus, the god of wine, with a spreading vine-branch in his left hand and a wine-cup in his right.

This cup is the only specimen of early Attic red-figure in Australia and is of particular importance as illustrating the new technique at the beginning of its great experimental period, when the old artistic conventions of black-figure no longer applied. Note how the transition between the frontal torso and the profile legs is facilitated by shifting the abdominal muscles a little to one side below the full-front chest, how an attempt at foreshortening is made with the legs of the giant, and the increasing tendency towards anatomical detail, though as yet in highly simplified forms. The eye is still shown in full-front view, with a large black dot in the centre for the iris; the hair is simply rendered in a black mass, with a row of short curls round the brow, temples and neck, sometimes with longer ones at the sides, and to show up this mass against the background, the upper contour is usually indi-

cated by a reserved line. A study of the treatment of these and other details, at a time when rapid stylistic developments were taking place, enables the establishment of a fairly accurate chronology for early red-figure, and our vase belongs to the closing years of the sixth century, about 510 B.C.

We know the name of its maker, the potter Pamphaios, but not of the artist who painted it. However, on grounds of style the cup must be closely related to other vases signed in the same way by Pamphaios, notably the Sleep and Death cup in the British Museum (E12). This vase has been associated with the Nicosthenes Painter, an artist who regularly decorated cups signed by Nicosthenes or Pamphaios as potters, and a comparison between ours and others by this painter leaves no doubt that it should be ascribed to his hand. Indeed, it is one of his finest extant works and the National Gallery must count itself very fortunate to possess an early signed cup, not only in such an excellent state of preservation but of unusually good quality and decorated with a rare and interesting subject.

A fuller publication of these vases will appear in the Annual Report of the Australian Humanities Research Council.

A. D. TRENDALL



Silen with Wineskin, centre, Attic Red Figure Cup. Felton Bequest 1957.

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DOCUMENTARY FILMS: on Tuesday, excepting each third Tuesday.

MUSICAL RECORDINGS: on the second and fourth Thursday.

All these activities are held at 1.15 p.m.

CORRECTION:

The previous issue should have been called volume XI, not volume XII.

The cover design in this issue is a detail from the Attic Black Figure Amphora, showing part of the wedding procession.