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Dourian Literacy

Robert Guy

The career of Douris as painter spans some four decades, from his apprentice years in the workshop of Euphronios shortly before 500 B.C., alongside Onesimos, the Triptolemos Painter and Makron, down to, and perhaps just beyond 470 B.C. The already considerable number of works both signed by and attributed to him increases almost daily. More than three hundred vases are known so far, a good proportion sadly but fragments. The range of shapes which he decorates is impressive: skyphos, kantharos, rhyton, phiale, oinochoe, psykter, neck-amphora, lekythos, aryballos and pyxis. At least two, a kantharos in Brussels and an aryballos in Athens, he signs as potter; the kantharos he signs also as painter. Cups, however, account for almost eighty percent of Douris's production. In his youth, he collaborates with four potters; on cups, with Euphronios, Kleophrades and Python. Only with the last of these does he manage, or choose, to establish a lasting partnership.

Beazley divides the artist's activity into four periods: very early and early; early middle; middle; and late. Douris has eased for us the charting of a long life by his atypical practice of signing frequently as painter — above fifty times between 500 and 480 B.C. The series of signatures begins at the outset of period one, and ends abruptly before the close of period three, while the kalos-name Hippiodamas is still current.

In addition to the remarkable frequency of his signatures, I should like to draw attention to the marked variety and abundance of inscriptions on works by Douris. We may recall the book-roll on his middle-period cup with school-scene, Berlin 2285; the puzzling inscription on the tondo of the Louvre's famous Memnon cup, signed uniquely by the potter Kalliades; the oft-repeated kalos-names — Chairestratos, Panaitios, Hippiodamas, Polyphrasmon, Hiketes, and once each Hermogenes, Pythaios, and Leosthenes; and the artist's fondness for labelling his figures from myth — beyond the Louvre's Eos and Memnon, the Vatican's equally famous Jason disgorged unharmed by an enormous serpent under the watchful eye of his protectress Athena, Atalanta and Erotes on Cleveland's splendid white-ground lekythos, Prometheus and Hera on a late cup in the Cabinet des Médailles.

Eos reappears on an extraordinary cup which has but lately come to my notice. On the main exterior side, we see her in determined pursuit of the young hunter Kephalos (both figures labelled). He hastens to the right in a vain attempt to avoid his lover's grip, clutching a pair of spears and turning head back to eye the goddess. Behind Eos stand two males with sceptres. Inscriptions identify them as Kekrops and Pandion, venerable kings of Athens whose presence here is quite unparalleled. The chase seems to have caught them unawares. Kekrops looks round to his son in some bewilderment, perhaps to urge a move in Kephalos's defence. There is a third figure, also regal, on the far right. He puts out his left hand to signal distress. Unfortunately, he is not named. In this context, however, he is doubtless Erechtheus, father of the ill-fated Prokris who was wife to Kephalos; father too of Kekrops, and founder of the Attic dynasty. Douris thus gives us our first Pandion in Athenian art securely identifiable by inscription, and shares with the Triptolemos Painter (who, on his ram's head rhyton in Virginia, depicts Theseus at ease, in company with Kekrops, possibly too with Pandion and Erechtheus) the honour of the first Kekrops. The theme of amorous pursuit continues on the other side, with Zeus (inscribed) and Ganymede. A young companion of the beloved, with hoop and stick normally held by Ganymede himself, flees off to the left. He extends his right hand in supplication towards a male protector. And inside, we look upon the sequel to Zeus's successful adventure: he sits composed, staff in hand, while the charming Ganymede serves him wine from an oinochoe.

Drama recurs on a well-preserved cup in private possession, this one unsigned and uninscribed — yet the graphic detail of its exterior scenes may suggest to some a literary model, to others give further proof if needed that Douris is often a rich vein for iconographers to mine. A seated Dionysos listens intently and unconcerned to the tune of a piping satyr, while "maenads" sway in frenzied dance about him; not here his familiar companions, with stalks of fennel and tame pets, but the women of Thebes whom we see in the very act of dismembering their youthful, intemperate king. Four swing about his severed legs and thighs from which bones grimly protrude. Two more still tear at Pentheus's upper half. He is *semianimus*, his eyes open, his arms flung out. Guts spill from the torso. The group's leader, an older woman who has pulled off her

mantle and twists it about in powerful hands, must be Agave. She participates in the wild revel, but not directly in her son's murder. There is a hint of sorrow, even of despair, in her ecstatic glance skyward; distress too, as well as excitement, in the frontal faces so rarely drawn by the painter. The three on this cup mark an emotional peak which he does not reach elsewhere.

Let us return now to the realm of mortals, to a cup in New York published some years ago by D. von Bothmer. Outside, men and youths gather for courtship. Inside, we may suppose that a music lesson is in store. The pupil, still bundled up in his mantle, has just arrived. A dog, recognising the familiar scent, moves to greet him. The teacher remains seated, stick in right, lyre in left held to his side. Directly below him painted in the reserve, is the name Egeas. The placing of the inscription is unique for the painter, and surely meant to apply to the nearest, to the elder figure. Perhaps Douris has given us, as Bothmer suggests, a portrait of Agias, or Hegias, of Troizen, the author of the *Nostoi*.

Finally, on later works by Douris himself, we may note three exclamations. The young client who, on a stemless cup in the Rosenberg collection, "... tests the taste and bouquet of the wine" which he draws by sponge from a storage amphora, cries out *TRIKOTVKOS*. A male dismisses a boy on a cup in Virginia. And unique in the painter's extensive repertoire of subjects is the coarse erotic group in Boston: a man calls out "keep still" as his female companion tries to brace herself against a footstool.

All these inscriptions attest to an unusually high degree of literacy on Douris's part, to the same extent not shared by any of his contemporaries. The *Triptolemos Painter*, whose mature style partakes of the Dourian, has curiously to his credit two cups which bear the signature of Douris. Both were very likely fashioned by Python, Douris's regular collaborator; and on each we encounter Dourian designs at the handles. As I have remarked elsewhere, this may represent a respectful nod by the *Triptolemos Painter* to Douris — if indeed the former is himself responsible for the signatures — even a boast of equality, rather than an identity of name. And it may be that the *Triptolemos Painter* was following Douris's lead as iconographical innovator when he was inspired to name a slain ram *Patroklos* on an extraordinary *stamnos* in Basle, likewise a bearded male *Triptolemos* (unique in Attic red-figure) on a *pelike* in Copenhagen, and to assemble four of Athens's legendary kings on the ram's head *rhyton* in Virginia.

Several of Douris's early classical followers inherit in fair measure their master's literary bent. The *Akestorides Painter* proudly displays his learning in no less than three book-rolls: on a charming cup-fragment in the *Bareiss* collection, a child begins recitation of an ode to *Herakles*, not so decipherable the verses inscribed on a cup in Washington, and on a squat *lekythos* in *Paestum* which came to light in 1979 (inv. 49809, from *Santa Venera* tomb 165; attributed to the *Akestorides Painter* by *Dottoressa Marina Cipriani*). Also by the artist, an early work, is a fine and well-preserved *pyxis* in the *British Museum*. Round the body of the vase, six women, paired-off and all but one named, busy themselves with duties and pleasures of the household: *Iphigeneia*, *Danae*, *Helen*, *Klytaimnestra* and *Kassandra*. *Beazley* observes that the painter has given his figures the names of *Argive* heroines — save, of course, the last for whom, again *Beazley* hazards, he may have meant *Timandra*.

The *Euaion Painter*, a direct pupil of the *Akestorides*, at the very outset of his career provides us with two further inscribed *pyxides*. *Peleus*, *Thetis*, *Nereus* and *Kymothoe* appear on the example in *Munich*; on that in *London*, the gathering is less conventional — *Thetis*, *Hippolyte* and *Mapsaura*, "fancy names" according to *Beazley*. A series of early cups by the artist bear a single figure, each identified by inscription: *Demeter*, *Hermes*, *Poseidon*, *Atalanta*; and on a cup-fragment in *Moscow*, *Apollodoros*.

A new cup-skyphos in *New York*, privately owned, surpasses in delicacy of technique the majority of the *Euaion Painter*'s early works. Inside, a bearded male in *pilos-hat* and patterned *chitoniskos*, *himation* slung over his left shoulder, presumably pours a libation at an altar of which we have only a touch of base and lower moulding. He has been named by the artist — somewhat surprisingly, *Menelaos*. On the reverse, traces of the handle ornament; and parts of three figures, one at least a male, although too little survives for a reading of the scene. On the obverse, a winged and dishevelled *Boreas*, arms outstretched, pursues *Oreithyia* who, fleeing to the right, turns head back to observe the quick approach of her assailant. Both are inscribed; so no doubt was the third player in the drama, a companion of *Oreithyia*, who moves away to the left. The *Euaion Painter* takes up this subject again, on three late works. The version on the cup-skyphos in *New York* reassuringly demonstrates how fresh his vision is in early years, how varied his interest in myth, and above all how truly miraculous his command of relief-line on a small-scale.

The artist is named after the *Euaion*, son of *Aischylos*, who is declared *kalos* on an impressive cup in the *Louvre*. Sparing of his praise, he accords it twice at least to *Euaion*, once to *Archimedes*, and possibly twice to *Nikon*.

To end, let us take a full step backwards to Douris's most sympathetic pupil, the *Oedipus Painter*, and specifically to his namepiece, a lively cup in the *Vatican* and one of only three vases assigned to him by *Beazley* without qualification. Within, *Oedipus*, simply dressed in cloak and *petasos*, a walking stick held fast between crossed legs, gives meditative heed to the *Theban Sphinx*. Decorously perched atop a small *Ionic column* at mid-field, she eyes him sternly and poses the third part of her vexing riddle. Recent cleaning has greatly freshened the cup's surfaces; the *K* of the *Sphinx's* spoken *KAITRI* is preserved complete. Arms crossed, left hand to chin in deep concentration, *Oedipus* ponders an answer. But for the moment his air of distress fails to tell us that he will hit upon the right one, that *Thebes* will yet be freed of its grim menace.

The pace quickens outside where drunken satyrs boisterously frolic. One relieves himself into a jug. Another pipes out a tune on the flutes. A companion, overcome by the strain, clasps his head and reels backwards. Already the largest of the wine-jars has been emptied. A horrified satyr, face frontal, covers his ear

with amphora's mouth, listening in despair for the fall of a last drop. And a satyr-father chastises his son for tippling. The hapless child, who has felt at least one blow of the sandal, clenches his teeth in pain and clasps outstretched hands together in an urgent appeal for protection. His uncle gestures to end the punishment. Indeed, he cries out "Enough", "No more!". An inscription, hastily sketched on the surface of the cup before firing, underlies the glaze of the background. Its rough, irregularly formed letters issue retrograde from the satyr's mouth and are virtually invisible, except in a raking light. What is more, this is only part of a verbal exchange. Further letters run from father to son; from son to father in reply. Surely the elder scolds, the child pleads forgiveness. And yet, after three separate attempts to extract certain readings from a fair jumble of lines — letters overrun by preliminary sketch for the figures and by stray marks to the glazed surface — once even after the vase's recent cleaning, I have still to find any real sense beyond the uncle's MHKETI. Clear as this is, it gives some hope that others with better eyes and more patience, perhaps too with technical aids, may be able to restore to us what must have been a private amusement for the painter as he cheerfully laid down his design and gave added life to an unusual domestic scene.

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