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Etruscan Mirrors of the Hellenistic Period?

Helle SALS KOV ROBERTS

First I should like to ask for your indulgence because I am addressing you on a subject which is really outside my usual field. I used to think of myself as an archaic person, but as I was recently asked to participate in the publication of the Corpus of Etruscan Mirrors and started work on the collection of the Danish National Museum, it occurred to me that some of the problems I met in fact came within the theme of this conference. The Danish National Museum possesses in its collection of some twenty Etruscan hand mirrors three pieces of a group often referred to as *Kranzspiegel* from the rather distinctive wreath framing the central designs of the reverses¹ (pl. 93-95, fig. 1-3). The date of this *Kranzspiegel* group has been the object of much controversy, suggestions varying from 4th Century B.C. to 3rd Century A.D. This wide chronological range is perhaps symptomatic of the difficulties facing people dealing with Hellenistic and Roman art. The burden—and maybe the beauty—of this long period is that it has accumulated the results achieved by former generations without discarding much and that it is never starting from scratch as happens after more clear cut destructions of civilizations we can sometimes observe in earlier—and later—periods.

The methodological problem is, in fact, quite general: When is the first occurrence of a certain phenomenon, when is the latest, and how do you place an object having this phenomenon within what may be quite a long period? The theoretical answer is simple: You try to establish a typological development, you concentrate your attention on the highest frequency of occurrences and you try to select not just one, but several phenomena, thereby narrowing the likely period of your object. In practice, as my example of the *Kranzspiegel* will show, differences of opinion present themselves as soon as you start selecting criteria and forming judgements as to what is the original form, what is derived, what is utterly debased and how long such a development is likely to take.

Let us take a look of some facts of these mirrors with a view of selecting suitable criteria.

The three mirrors in question all have a handle ending in a ram's head cast in one piece with the disc, an oblique edge of the disc, a raised framing band and a convex reflecting side of the disc.

The engraved decoration shows the characteristic compact wreath consisting of closely set tiers of three leaves with straight bindings in two or four places. The main design has a composition of three or four persons. The workmanship both of the casting and of the engraving is of a high quality, especially as far as two of these mirrors are concerned.

Sir John Beazley, no slight authority on ancient art, pointed out the special way of rendering the hair in clusters of concentric arcs, a phenomenon he knew from Etruscan vase-painting. It is especially found in works by the Hesione Painter, the chief artist of the Volterra group, whose active period is placed between 320 and 300 B.C. The major production of these mirrors, which he terms Class Z, he places in the 3rd Century B.C.² Sybille Haynes³ largely follows Beazley. She also refers to similarities of style with the tomba dell'Orco, Tarquinia, and the tomba François, Vulci, which she takes to be around 300 B.C. Mrs. Haynes favours a Chiusi workshop for the mirrors on the basis of urn reliefs which she admits are, however, later⁴. She also deals with a frequent compositional principle of placing the figures in a convex arc, found often on Etruscan urns from about the middle of the Third Century to the end of the Second Century B.C.⁵.

Several scholars have connected the general style with the Red-figured Kertch vases, which

implies a 4th Century date⁶. The other extreme is represented by Mrs. Enking⁷, who thought the special stylisation of the hair represented the complicated hairstyle of Flavian ladies. She also took a special interest in the wreath of the framing band to which she saw a parallel on the *torus* of the column of Trajan. She did not think of the Kranzspiegel as a chronologically closely connected group, but referred one mirror to Antonine times, another to the period of Alexander Severus⁸.

R. Herbig⁹ takes a middle course and places the group around 100 B.C. He does not think it likely that the production covers too long a span of time. He stresses the importance of the formal wreath, which he places in the sphere of Greek Hellenistic art, especially in the Magna Graecia version, but also with examples from Kertch tomb paintings of the Second Century B.C.

Obviously all these excellent people cannot be right, but if you check their parallels most of them seem reasonably well-founded. Beazley's concentric arcs from the end of the 4th Century B.C. are very close to the hair style seen on the mirrors, but Mrs. Enking is also quite right that wreaths of the Kranzspiegel type find much more convincing parallels in Imperial, even in Late Imperial Rome than most of those suggested from Greek Hellenistic art. The Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen has a Roman sarcophagus from the Third Century A.D. showing a wreath with straight bindings very close to the mirror wreaths¹⁰.

Let us take a closer look at the wreath. A practical experiment has convinced me that what is represented is a wreath of laurel or bay leaves. They produce exactly this spiky look, which is not even particularly stylized in the engravings. Although a laurel wreath constituted the prize at the Delphic Games it has not left much trace in Greek art. The parallels suggested by Herbig show much thinner garlands with oblique bindings. Also the *torus* of the column of Trajan which is rather more like the mirror wreath has oblique bindings.

Roman altars from earlier times do, however, also show a relevant wreath. From the Augustan period we have an altar from the theatre at Arles¹¹ and there are other close Augustan examples from Spain¹² (*pl. 96, fig. 4*).

If we look back not to Greek, but to Etruscan art, we find the wreath worn by *obesi Etrusci* on the lids of sarcophagi. The Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek has a series of these from Chiusi. This one is made of alabaster and has preserved both the cutting quite distinctly and the gilding on the leaves. The garland around his neck is made from different leaves, but in connection with the Kranzspiegel it is relevant to observe the straight bindings and that this wreath has straight ends held together around the back of the neck with a thin band. This means that if the wearer takes his wreath off he can produce a circular wreath or garland by putting the ends together and tying the band round¹³ (*pl. 96, fig. 5-6*). This is no isolated example. More familiar is perhaps the magistrate, also from Chiusi, now in Florence¹⁴. Here is another sarcophagus from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek¹⁵ (*pl. 96, fig. 7*).

The Style is very much connected with Pergamene art of the Second Century B.C.¹⁶, but both the style of portraiture and the wreath type have a long life through Roman times.

To return to the hairstyle of the mirror figures it may, I think, be found at any period after the creation of the Alexander iconography¹⁷. The portrait thought to represent Attalos I Soter has a rendering of the hair which I think is relevant. I do not think any complicated hair dressing is meant, but what we see is a stylisation of short locks cut in tiers to about equal length all over the head¹⁸. This feature, therefore, has a very limited chronological value, *i.e.* *post* end of 4th Century B.C.¹⁹. It should be noted, however, that a 1st Century B.C. copy of a head of Alexander, now in the Capitoline Museum, has the anastole stylized into clusters of concentric arcs or semi-arcs in what looks like the three-dimensional versions of the stylisation seen on the engravings of the mirrors²⁰.

The inscriptions found on some of the mirrors may prove to be decisive. In the case of this mirror²¹ they give unequivocally the names of the figures represented *i.e.* those of the Etruscan gods *Tinia*, *Uni*, *Turms* and *Menrva* (*pl. 93, fig. 1a-c*).

In the case of this other mirror²² the written information is more surprising. From right to left we read over the first youth to the right *Hercle*, the naked young woman is called *Malavis*. The next figure, who is without doubt male, has above the indication *Artumes*, the Etruscan version of Artemis.

Finally comes *Aplu*, *i.e.* Apollon, fitting the young male reasonably well (*pl. 94, fig. 2a-b*). Now, how could the artist commit the mistake of giving a young man the name of a goddess? Or, if you like, represent the divine Artumes as a man? Carelessness? Well, the mirror is rather elaborate, both in the cast work and in the engraving. Ignorance? I find a better explanation. It does not alter the position much whether you suppose the engraver of the names was someone other than the artist responsible for the design. And as the inscription is sinistroverse it cannot be a slip of the burin that you automatically continue with Artemis, once you have started with Apollon. But why is an artist ignorant of the sex or other characteristics of Artumes?

Because he is unfamiliar with Etruscan language and religion. Although he is manufacturing for an Etruscan-speaking market, he is himself most likely speaking Latin and calling the goddess concerned by the completely different name of Diana and it does not strike him as at all odd to call a male *Artumes*.

If the artist of this mirror was working in a workshop placed in, say Palestrina or Rome, this would not be so surprising. We have, for example, the Marsyas-Painiskos mirror found in Palestrina with the Latin artist's signature: *Vibis Pilipus cailavit*²³ and we have the Ficoroni cista signed *NOVIOS. PLAUTIOS. MED ROMAI. FECID.*²⁴ Cistae were used as containers for mirrors among other toilet articles and most likely the same workshops produced both cistae and mirrors²⁵.

The Kranzspiegel, however, are not likely to have come from Palestrina, Rome or even South Etruscan towns, where Latin was widespread already in the Fourth Century B.C.

All the striking stylistic parallels referred to by Beazley and Sybille Haynes come from Northern Etruria, especially the Chiusi region, and so do the sculptures in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek and in Florence, which we have been looking at in connection with the laurel wreath. The workshop of the Kranzspiegel should most likely be sought around Chiusi.

Recent research into the romanization and language shift of Etruria suggests that this took place in the Chiusi region from about 90 B.C. over a period of perhaps two or three generations, thus approaching the Early Empire²⁶. In the case of Volterra the Etruscan language is still predominant between 60 and 30 B.C. and found possibly as late as 10-20 A.D.²⁷

This seems to me to fit well with a certain frequency of the spiky laurel wreath in the early Augustan period, and I would take this as a likely time of the production of the majority of the Kranzspiegel group, which incorporates a great number of features originating in the Early Hellenistic artistic tradition. The fact that several of these mirrors are of a high technical and artistic quality and preserve original features well has led many people, particularly those tempted by the idea that early as a rule means good and late bad, to think that these mirrors were several centuries older than other factors indicate they are.

Notes

¹ Danish National Museum, Department of Classical and Near Eastern Antiquities, inv. nr. 626 (diam.: 112,5 mm; h.: 229 mm), inv. nr. 2059 (diam.: 134 mm; h.: 279 mm. Publ.: E. Gerhard, *Etruskische Spiegel* 5 [1884-1897] pl. 85, 2; C.F. Gamurrini, *Appendice al Corpus Inscriptionum Italicarum* [1880] nr. 773), inv. nr. ABa 706 (diam.: 128 mm; h.: 255 mm).

² J.D. Beazley, *Etruscan Vase Painting* (1947) 132 et *passim*. *JHS* 69, 1949, 16f.

³ *MDAI* 6, 1953, 29f.

⁴ *L. c.* 34.

⁵ *L. c.* 42.

⁶ A. Furtwängler - K. Reichhold, *Griechische Vasenmalerei* 2 (1909) 42.

⁷ *AA* 1948-49, 183f.

⁸ *L. c.* 205f.

⁹ *SE* 24, 1955-56, 183f.

¹⁰ Cat. nr. 788, *Billedtavler Kat. o. antike Kunstvaerker* (1907) pl. 68.

¹¹ D. Strong, *Roman Art* (1976) fig. 98.

¹² From Pan Caliente, *AA* 1954, 352f., fig. 29. From Mérida, *I. c.* 349, fig. 24.

¹³ Cat. H 296. *Bildertafeln des etruskischen Museums (Helbig Museum) der Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek* (1928) pl. 134.

¹⁴ Inv. nr. 5482, G. Giglioli, *L'arte etrusca* (1935) pl. 365,1.

¹⁵ Cat. H 301, *Bildertafeln* pl. 140.

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. E. Schmidt, *Le Grand Autel de Pergame* (1962) pl. 30 et *passim*.

¹⁷ E.g. Alexander Rondanini, *Glyptothek München, Führer* (1972) pl. 31.

¹⁸ G.M.A. Richter, *Greek Portraits* 3 (1960) 273f., fig. 1915.

¹⁹ Cf. also the gorgoneion from Perugia, H. Brunn-G. Körte, *I rilievi delle urne etrusche* 3 (1916) pl. 140, 7, where you see some of the arcs still like curls. *Pl.* 96, fig. 8.

²⁰ M. Bieber, *Alexander the Great in Greek and Roman Art* (1964) pl. 91. L. Laurenzi, *Ritratti Greci* (1941) nr. 41 pl. 15.

²¹ Danish National Museum inv. nr. 626.

²² Danish National Museum inv. nr. 2059.

²³ Gerhard *op. c.* (*supra* n. 1) pl. 45. A. Fabretti, *Primo supplemento alla raccolta delle antichissime iscrizioni italiane* (1872) nr. 478. Giglioli *op. c.* (*supra* n. 14) pl. 304, 2.

²⁴ T. Dohrn, *Die Ficoronische Ciste* (*Monumenta Artis Romanae* 11, 1972) pl. 20.

²⁵ E.g. the Praenestine mirror that belonged to Franz Peter is reported to have been found in a cista with four alabastra and a strigil. A mirror in Arezzo shows a cista with two alabastra and may be the handle of a mirror, A. Ciattini *et al.*, *Itinerari Etruschi, Pistoia* (1971) 149.

²⁶ *Acta Inst. Rom. Finlandiae* 5, 1975, 206f.

²⁷ *L. c.* 215f., 271f.

List of illustrations

Pl. 93, fig. 1a: Bronze mirror. Danish National Museum inv. nr. 626. Museum Photo.

Pl. 93, fig. 1b-c: Section and engraved decoration of *fig. 1a*. Drawings by Setsuko Kubo.

Pl. 94, fig. 2a: Bronze mirror. Danish National Museum inv. nr. 2059. Museum Photo.

Pl. 94, fig. 2b: Engraved decoration of *fig. 2a*. Drawing by Setsuko Kubo.

Pl. 94, fig. 2c: Handle of *fig. 2a*. Drawing by Setsuko Kubo.

Pl. 94, fig. 2d: Section of *fig. 2a*.

Pl. 95, fig. 3a-b: Section and engraved decoration of bronze mirror. Danish National Museum inv. nr. ABa 706. Drawings by Setsuko Kubo.

Pl. 96, fig. 4: Fragment of relief from Pan Caliente, Spain. After AA 1954, 355.

Pl. 96, fig. 5: Detail of alabaster sarcophagus lid from Chiusi. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek inv. nr. H. 296. Photo HSR.

Pl. 96, fig. 6: Detail of alabaster sarcophagus lid from Chiusi. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek inv. nr. H. 296. Photo HSR.

Pl. 96, fig. 7: Detail of alabaster sarcophagus lid from Chiusi. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek inv. nr. H. 301. Photo HSR.

Pl. 96, fig. 8: Relief from Perugia. After Brunn-Körte *op. c.* 3, pl. 140,7.