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# ΕΡΩΣ kalos

ESSAY ON EROTIC ELEMENTS IN GREEK ART



JEAN MARCADÉ

PROFESSOR OF ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE FACULTY  
OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BORDEAUX

704.94215

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NAGEL PUBLISHERS

GENEVA — PARIS — HAMBURG — NEW YORK

CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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## FOREWORD

*After KAMA KALA and ROMA AMOR, here is EROS KALOS.*

*After the sculptures from the “banned” temples of medieval India and the Campanian frescoes from the secret museum of Naples, the daring nature of the erotic decorations on the vases and mirrors of ancient Greece may come as something of a surprise. The “noble simplicity” and “calm grandeur” spoken of by Winckelmann are still, for many people, the essential characteristics of Greek art, which they consider as the earliest and most celebrated form of academic art, according it a somewhat perfunctory admiration out of respect for the classical tradition.*

*But the true greatness of Greek art did not lie in frigid perfection or in some sort of detachment from reality.*

*The impulse that carried Greece so far in the realms of art and philosophy sprang from a passionate sense of living reality. Nowhere less than in Greece was the spiritual life considered as being divorced from the physical life, or the pleasures of the mind from those of the body, and it is significant that in their definition of the good and upright man the ancient Greeks linked physical distinction with nobility of heart.*

*In discussing the part played by sexuality in the religious ideas and daily life of ancient Greece, we have tried to avoid giving a distorted or unfair picture. We feel that we have touched on something elementary, yet fundamental, in Greek culture, and hope that we have breathed a little warmth into those shadowy figures that some consider as the real progenitors of Western civilization. The generous co-operation of our Greek colleagues and the directors of the leading museums in Europe and America has greatly encouraged us in this undertaking.*

*We have much pleasure in thanking Messrs C. Karouzos (Director of the National Museum of Athens) and N. Platon (Director of the Acropolis Museum), Messrs V. Karageorghis (Curator of the Museum of Nicosia), C. Montis and S. Patsalides (Cyprus), Mr R. Milliex (Cultural Attaché to the French Embassy in Nicosia); also Mrs E. N. Papert (New York), Mrs E. P. Riegel (Boston), and Professor E. M. Auer (Vienna), Professor K. Blümel (Berlin), Professor N. Degrassi (Tarento), Professor P. Devambex (Paris), Professor A. Greiffenhagen (Berlin), Professor R. Lullies (Munich), Professor H. Möbius (Würzburg). Professor R. Noll (Vienna), and Professor W. Zschietzschmann (Giessen).*

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# EROS KALOS

## I

The phrase "Eros Kalos" has never, it seems, been found on a Greek vase, but the inscription "kalos" or "ho pais kalos" sometimes accompanies portrayals of Aphrodite's winged son on Greek pottery of the 5th century B.C. It is a tribute not so much to the beauty of the picture as to that of the young god himself, and it is a tribute of love. This would seem to be confirmed by the abundance of vases of the same period that bear proper names—prescribed by the customer or chosen by the artist—followed by the adjective "beautiful". These are usually men's names and bear witness to the special tastes of the period; if some occur more frequently than others, it is because the youths referred to had a host of admirers.

The preamble to one of Plato's dialogues shows the effect produced by the appearance of one of these favourites in public. Socrates, returning from military service, goes to the palaestra of Taureas to see his friends again. He has barely had time to ask a few preliminary questions—How is philosophy faring? Is there anyone of the younger generation outstanding for learning, looks, or both?—when several youths appear, deep in discussion. They are followed by another group and Critias explains that they are all admirers of the current favourite, Charmides, son of Glaucon. Then Charmides himself appears, and Socrates is quite frank about his reactions: "He struck me as admirable in stature and beauty, and I could see that they all adored him, judging by the stir of excitement that ran through the crowd when he



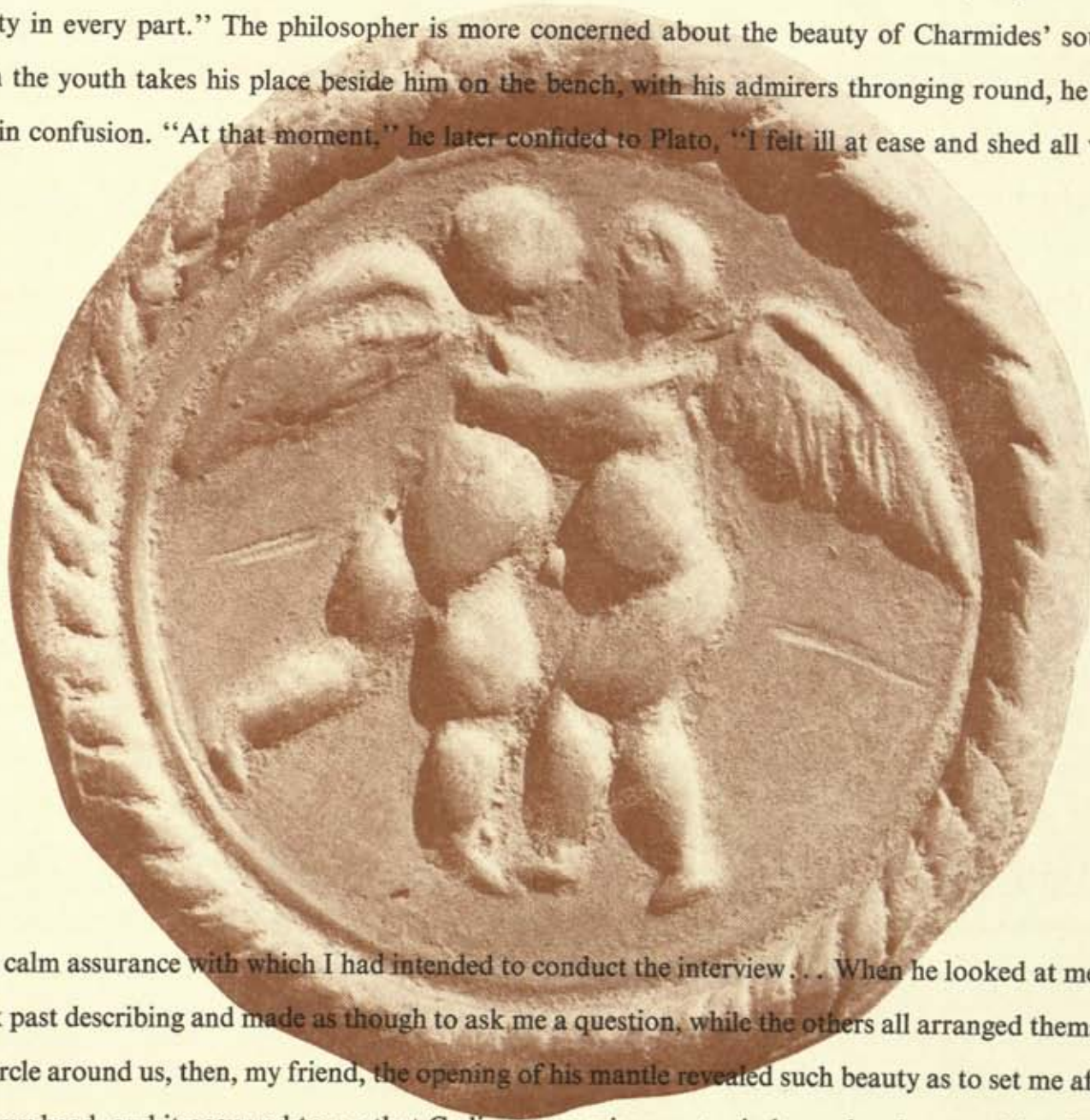








arrived; and he was followed by more admirers. Where we grown men were concerned, well and good, but I looked at the children and saw that all of them, even the smallest, had their eyes fixed on him and were gazing at him as though he were a statue." Not only was he fair of face, but, stated Cheriphon, "if he could be prevailed upon to disrobe, you would have no more eyes for his face, so perfect is his beauty in every part." The philosopher is more concerned about the beauty of Charmides' soul, but when the youth takes his place beside him on the bench, with his admirers thronging round, he feels a certain confusion. "At that moment," he later confided to Plato, "I felt ill at ease and shed all vestige



of the calm assurance with which I had intended to conduct the interview... When he looked at me with a look past describing and made as though to ask me a question, while the others all arranged themselves in a circle around us, then, my friend, the opening of his mantle revealed such beauty as to set me aflame, I lost my head, and it occurred to me that Cydias was a wise mentor in love when he gave this advice to a friend concerning a beautiful youth:

'Goat faced with a lion,  
Beware of losing thy share.'

It seemed that I was the victim in a similar encounter."



The Greeks' very lively awareness of physical beauty—male even more than female beauty, because their most frequent experience of it came from watching the exercises of the palaestra and the gymnasium, where nudity was obligatory—may explain their portrayal of the God of Love in the first classical era: not as the chubby infant he was to become in Hellenistic and Roman art, but in the first instinctive grace of young manhood with a slim, well-proportioned body trained in the disciplines of the paideia. He is depicted quite naturally in the attitudes and occupations of the young athletes whose model he became—wrestling, running, jumping, or swimming, holding the torch of the lampadedromia or the shield of the race under arms, playing at *mora* or knucklebones, or bowling a hoop. Striking the lyre, playing the double flute, or sounding the trumpet, he is also the model of the intellectual distinction, symbolised by music, that complements the physical distinction developed by exercises of the body. Wearing the crown or band of victory, he awards the prize of beauty, he encourages the amorous exploits of the ephebes, sometimes setting the example himself by pursuing youthful quarry. He is the ideal and exemplar of youth, combining its fleeting charm with the emotions it arouses: desire, longing, and the intoxication of mutual passion, for at first Himeros, Anteros, Pothos and Eros were all portrayed by the same type of image.

According to Athenian tradition, the oldest altar to the God of Love was the one built by Charmas at the entrance to the gymnasium of the Academy. Other gymnasia are known to have been placed under the joint patronage of Eros, Heracles and Hermes, and at Thespieae in Boeotia the great gymnastic and musical games were placed under the patronage of Eros alone. It is not surprising that the cult of Eros should have flourished particularly at the gymnasia, where beauty could be admired in all its nakedness, and that the youthful god should have become the patron of the many homosexual unions that originated there. Developments in the sculpture of Praxiteles during the 4th century B.C. show the influence of the homosexuality prevalent at the time: his images of Eros take on an equivocal seductiveness in which the rounded hips and bosom, the sinuous indolence of the attitude, and the curled hair become farther and farther removed from the ideal of athletic grace.

But Eros is also, according to common belief—and this was to be particularly stressed in the Hellenistic era—the son of the “golden Aphrodite”. The winged youth, who, together with a winged female genius of the same age, is yoked to the chariot of the goddess on the little terra-cotta altars of Tarentum,



























is perhaps (although the figures are traditionally said to represent Zephyrus and Iris) the example of filial piety that inspired Cleobis and Biton of Argos to put their athletic vigour at the service of their mother, the priestess of Hera, and pull the heavy processional chariot to the place of sacrifice. At any rate, on the Doric frieze of the Parthenon Eros is shown, bow in hand, fighting to defend his mother against the Giants, while on the frieze of the Panathenaea he is portrayed leaning against his mother's knee to put on the peplos. No doubt it is the duty of the paragon of youthful virtue to give an example of filial devotion, courage and affection, but he does even more by refusing to oppose the conception of love he favours to that protected by Aphrodite. In fact, he makes himself her ally, and co-operates with Peitho (Persuasion) to promote fruitful unions.

The Greeks, whose devotion to beauty kept them as a rule from depicting physical ugliness in their art, were naturally much inspired by the voluptuousness of the female form, and, by creating Hermaphrodite, their artistic imagination sought to unite in a single being the two aspects of nature and human beauty whose complementary character their philosophers so frequently pointed out. Though justifying sexual relations between youths, Eros is also the defender of adulterers accused by Hera, guardian of marriage. A well-known story tells how Phryne was brought to judgement on a charge of profanation and successfully defended by Hypereides in the name of beauty; but another and longer trial offers an even better example of the reverence of the ancient Greeks for womanly beauty and their indulgence for the spell it casts.

Helen's cause is at first sight a difficult one to defend: though married, she willingly followed Paris, and the Trojan War took place to avenge the honour of Menelaus. However, as far back as Homer, the responsibility for her abduction was placed on the gods, and particularly on Aphrodite. Hesiod, with greater severity, attributed personal guilt to the heroine, but with the lyric poets the question of beauty came to the fore. For Aeschylus, Helen's beauty had a diabolical quality, while Euripides introduced a psychological and moral note by seeking to reduce her to the level of a wanton because she left her chosen husband for a more affluent lover. But it was the rhetors who thrust aside ethical considerations, coming back to the theme of Helen's divine beauty and consequent lack of personal responsibility. Thus we have the defence by Gorgias and above all Isocrates' eulogy of Helen in which he vigorously defends the superior claims of beauty, "the most venerated, the most precious, the most divine of endowments",









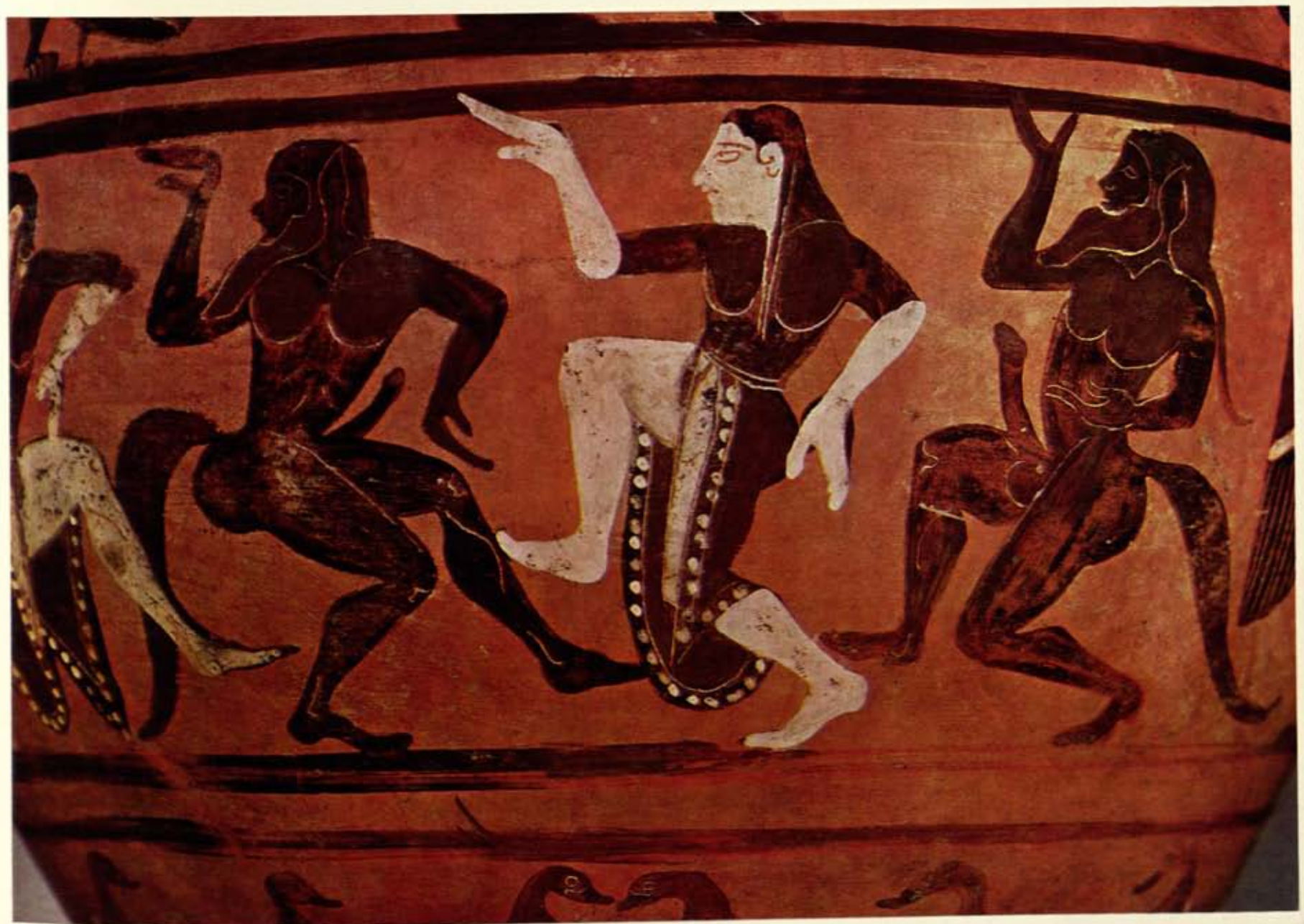


stating that “more human beings have been rendered immortal by beauty than by any other quality” and asserting that Helen’s beauty conferred on her a power equal to that of the gods and that finally she was a benefit to the whole of Greece. Here we see Helen becoming the triumphant symbol of all-conquering beauty, and certainly worthy of the cult that arose at Laconia in her honour.





Even before Isocrates' eulogy, however, artists had shown the gods conniving at Helen's abduction, and Menelaus foiled in his vengeance by the beauty of his faithless wife. There are vase paintings of Aphrodite and Peitho encouraging Helen to go with Paris and protecting her after the Sack of Troy when Menelaus, still in the garb of a hoplite, rushes upon her with naked sword. Eros comes between





them and the sword falls from the warrior's avenging hand. The scene recalls the chorus on Eros, invincible in battle, in the *Antigone* of Sophocles:

"Love, invincible love, you swoop down on our flocks and watch, ever alert, over the fresh faces of our maidens; you float above the waves and across the countryside where the wild beasts couch. And among the gods themselves, or mortal men, there is no-one who can escape you. Whoever touches you is at once thrown into delirium."

The wings of Eros signify his mobility, his swift presence anywhere in the world, and also indicate that he belongs to higher spheres. Olympus is ceaselessly swept by the passions of love; gods and goddesses experience desire and sensual pleasure. Hera herself turns coquette to seduce her inconstant husband, and is united with him at the summit of Mt Gargarus where the sacred ground is suddenly sprinkled with flowers. Aphrodite burns for the embraces of her lover Ares, and is suddenly caught in the invisible net spread by her husband Hephaistos. Pluto carries off Persephone, and a metope from Selinus shows—with a sensitivity and intensity of emotion that have often been commented on—the seated god taking her by the wrist with a gesture of imperious majesty, as she stands before him, slowly withdrawing her veil. The gods engage in rivalries, quarrels and jealousy among themselves, and Greek mythology is as full of the amorous adventures of the heroes as it is of their brave deeds. As the messenger of a universal power, Eros intervenes everywhere and is sometimes endowed like Hermes with heel-wings and a caduceus. He himself is involved with Psyche, and the ravishment of the soul by love is the subject of a number of groups, from the fourth century B.C. onwards, in which Psyche—endowed with speckled butterfly wings—is shown first beside Eros and then in his arms.

The symbolism of the wings of Love seems inexhaustible. However brutal, the rape of a mortal by a god or goddess assumes the transport of the chosen one to a higher state. For this reason, it was not unfitting to represent scenes of rape at the centre of pediments, on antefixes at the edges of roofs, and on acroterae topping religious buildings. Are the wings with which the ravishers, both male and female, are sometimes endowed simply personal attributes of the divinities depicted? Is Eos, sister of Helios and Selene, winged because she is Goddess of the Dawn or because Aphrodite, jealous of her union with Ares, has made her eternally questing, always in search of a lover to carry off? Orion, Cephalus and particularly Tithonus, on whom she asked Zeus to bestow immortality (unfortunately forgetting at the same time to ask for eternal youth to be added), were her most famous victims. The wings of Boreas, God of











the North Wind, are surely appropriate not only for the brother of Zephyrus and Norus, but also for the ravisher of the nymph Orithyia whose abduction from the banks of the Ilissus is recounted in the preamble to the *Phaedra* of Plato. It is striking that pictures of the winged god carrying off the daughter of Erechtheus in his arms alternated so often with pictures of Eros and Psyche on bronze funerary vessels. And finally, the list of lovers or victims of love changed into birds—from Caenis to Coronis, from Tereus to Philomela—is a long one. Is this mere chance?

Again there is the association between the wings of Eros and the doves or swan of Aphrodite, not to mention the sacred goose that Scopas (4th century B.C.) places at the feet of Pothos in his allegory of amorous longing. The hollows of the downy wings seem to throb with a warm sensuality. A fine amphora from Arezzo, attributed to the Painter of Meideias, shows Pelops and Hippodamia fleeing in a chariot; above them are two birds whose coupling is a scarcely veiled allusion to the pleasures awaiting the two fugitives. Groups on cups indicate that a cockerel or a hare was the usual gift offered to youths by men seeking their favours, and children playing with cockerels or holding them are very often shown as objects of solicitation or amorous pursuit. In a group on a terracotta acrotera from the Museum at Olympia, Zeus—represented as a bearded traveller—has seized on the young Ganymede, who is holding a cockerel. But the erotic significance of the soft contact of feathers becomes altogether explicit in the metamorphoses of Zeus into an eagle to carry off Ganymede, and into a swan to seduce Leda.

While legend generally has it that the eagle was simply a messenger sent by Zeus to seek the young Trojan shepherd and carry him off to the dwelling-place of the Immortals, it is certain that for the artists it represented the god himself coming down in the form of an eagle to seize his prey. For proof, one need only look at the admirable Greek mirror in Berlin which shows the naked youth, clutched to the bird's belly, his head thrown back voluptuously as though awaiting a kiss. The theme of Leda, approached by Zeus in the form of a swan, is treated with the utmost delicacy. Pulling her veils aside to nestle tenderly and protectively against the breast of the divine bird, Leda is aroused by the feel of the warm, living down against her thighs, while the bird curves its graceful neck towards her mouth.

Aphrodite, who is sometimes shown riding on a swan or a goose, extends her sway over the birds. The winged Eros, an emanation of her power, shares in their nature. What a charming and poetic reminder this is of the universal empire of love!



## II

Although the conventional image of Eros did not become established in Greek art until a relatively late date, the ideas personified by this image existed from remotest antiquity. Long before he became the winged son of Aphrodite concerned with the carnal affections of men and of the anthropomorphized gods of Olympus, Love was considered as a fundamental principle of all life, extending his sway over the whole of creation. There are still echoes of this idea in the chorus from the *Antigone* already quoted, and the *Birds* of Aristophanes trace the origin of their species back to Eros:

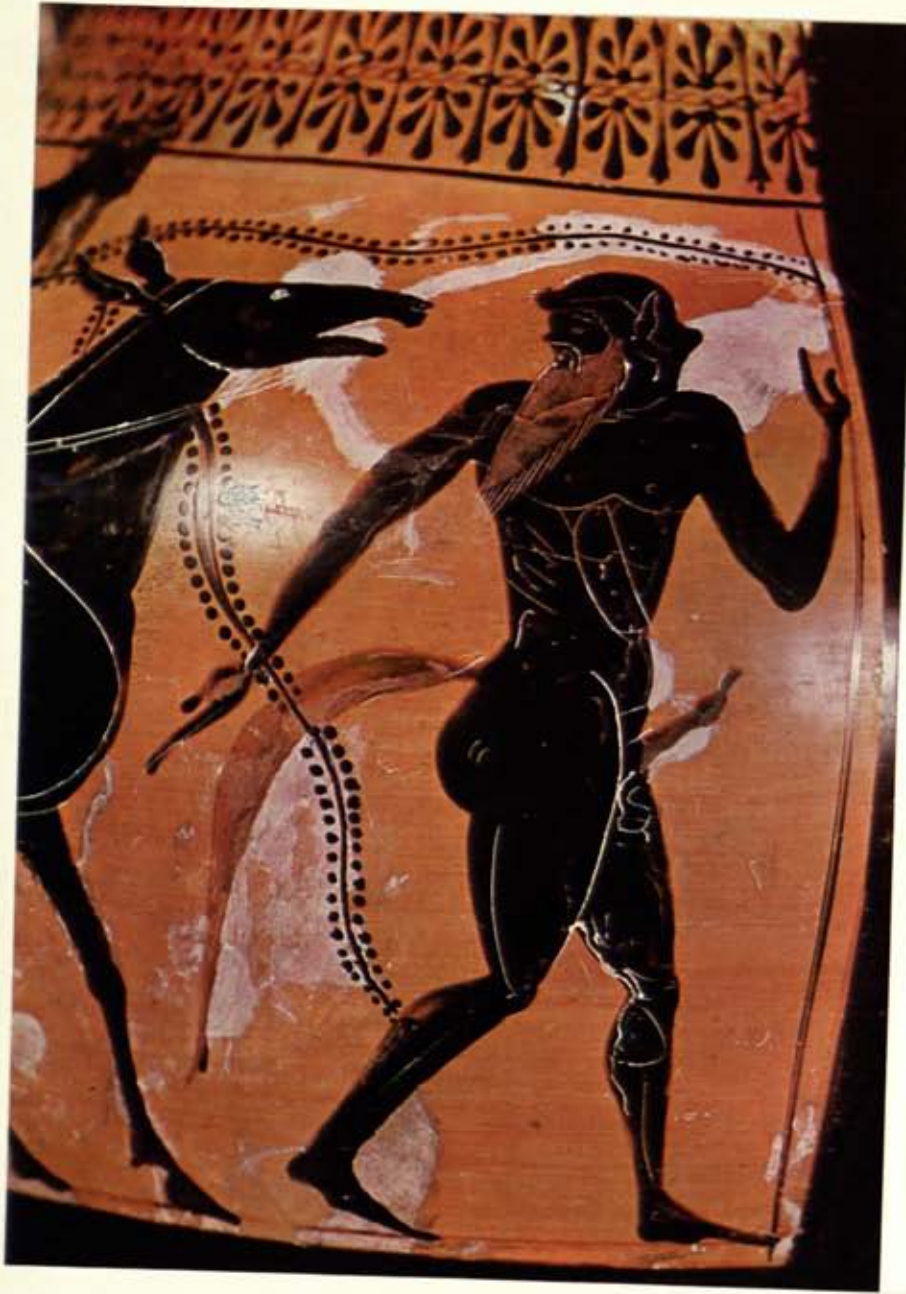
"In the beginning were Chaos and Night and the black Erebus and the vast Tartarus, but earth, air and sky did not exist. In the infinite bosom of Erebus, black-winged Night first of all produced an egg from which in the course of the seasons Eros was born—Eros, the desired, with his glittering golden wings, Eros rapid as the whirlwind. It was he who, united by night with Chaos in the vast Tartarus, become the originator of our race."

Similarly, the *Theogony* of Hesiod places the birth of Eros well before that of Aphrodite, at a time when only Chaos and Earth existed. The Eros who is shown on vase paintings holding a branch or offering a flower is not only an evocation of the springtime (season of love) and its flowers, but also of primitive beliefs linking the god with the origin of plants as well as of animals. According to a fragment of the *Danaïdes* of Aeschylus, Eros brought about the union of the Sky and the Earth, and the Earth, fertilized by the rain, brought forth the grain that nourishes man and the grass that feeds the flocks.









The act of carnal love is also related to the most ancient agrarian rites. The story of Demeter, who lay with Iasion "in a thrice-ploughed field" and conceived a son, Plutos, spreader of abundance, is echoed in the figurines representing embracing couples that were used as talismans to encourage a fruitful harvest. That such images date back to the neolithic age is suggested by some terracotta fragments found in the deepest layers excavated at Sesklo in Thessaly. Majewski recently drew attention to a "votive bed" in clay bearing a recumbent couple (Belgrade Museum), and the same subject is treated on an item in the



Vlastos collection in Athens. At an even later period, the Greek islands—particularly Crete in the 7th century B.C.—produced numerous examples of “divine couples” who can be taken as the performers of a propitiatory *hieros gamos*.

There is another series of figures, dating quite far back and representing women brazenly holding their thighs apart. The “frog” designs of the neolithic age—whose meaning became clearer when they were linked with the carving on an oinochoe from Mallia—are forerunners of the long series of terracotta and stone idols found in the Aegean basin and representing the divinity known as the “Great Goddess”. Although she is not often associated with a male partner, it is clear that this divinity was not everywhere thought of as capable of conceiving without being fertilized, and her femininity, expressly indicated by the drawing of the vagina and by the breasts, stresses the fundamental association between the idea of fecundity and that of fertility. The “swinging” statuettes would seem to owe their magic power over the crops to their erotic symbolism. A number of crude figurines with holes in them for cords have been found; they date from the neolithic age onwards and were particularly frequent in bronze-age Crete where they represented seated or standing goddesses or priestesses. As late as the 5th century B.C., according to Pausanias, a mystic fresco painted by Polygnotus of Thasos on the walls of the clubhouse of the Cnidians at Delphi included the figure of Phaedra swinging on a rope.

A pleasant picture on a red-figured skyphos in Berlin, reproduced at the end of this book, shows a girl on a swing being pushed by an attendant knight. It would be a mistake to consider this as a mere *genre* piece, however, for the attendant knight is in reality a Satyr, and the girl is taking part in a Dionysiac festival: the Attic festival of the Aeora. Legend has it that this festival was started to expiate the murder of Icarius, a local hero who gave his neighbours some wine supplied by Dionysus, and was killed by them because they thought they had been poisoned. In honour of Erigone, the daughter of Icarius, who hanged herself from the tree beneath which her father’s body lay, and also to commemorate a veritable epidemic of suicides subsequently provoked by the wrath of Dionysus, a lament was sung and ropes were attached to trees for girls to swing on. This story, like the tradition that Phaedra hanged herself in remorse and despair after the death of Hippolytus, was a myth invented to explain a ritual inherited from the remote past.



















A similar survival, at the height of the Classical period, was the ceremony of the Boucoleion on the second day of the Anthesteria. According to Thucydides, the Anthesteria was the most ancient feast of Dionysus; it was celebrated at Athens at the beginning of spring, on the 11th, 12th and 13th days of the month of Anthesterion. It began with a drinking festival; the embargo on wine from the last harvest was solemnly lifted, the jars were opened, a libation was offered to the god, and a great deal was drunk. Then the arrival of Dionysus in Attica was re-enacted; a chariot, representing the ship in which the god had arrived, was first of all drawn to the sanctuary of the Lenaeum for various ceremonies in which the *basilinna* (wife of the king archon and successor of the original queen of the city) and her ladies-in-waiting took part. Afterwards the *basilinna* drove with the god on a nuptial chariot to the Boucoleion, the old royal residence, where they were united in marriage.

Was this a mystic or a carnal union? The term used by Aristotle in his *Constitution of Athens* would seem to imply the latter, and it would not be surprising if the part of the god had been taken by the king archon in memory of the ancient prerogatives of the priest-king. In that case, the sexual act very probably took place. Here again we have the old agrarian rite of the *hieros gamos*, and, because it roused the powers asleep in the bosom of the earth, the feast of the dead on the third day of the Anthesteria tended to have the same significance; for Dionysus, under a Chthonian aspect, is Pluto the "giver of wealth", and through his dominion over the dead he has accumulated a treasury of mysterious powers affecting the fertility of the fields and the fecundity of living creatures.

The fact that very ancient rites of erotic magic are twice combined, at the Classical period, in ceremonies of the Dionysiac cult is no coincidence. There are other links. Eros, as we have said, is sometimes depicted holding a branch or a flower and the poets celebrate his return in the springtime; whole series of vases show Dionysus holding a leafy branch, which miraculously proliferates in his hand and becomes covered with grapes—one of the most definite characteristics of Dionysus is that he is a god of renewal. Eros presides over abductions, over transports of the soul. Dionysus is *par excellence* the god of possession, maenadism, and orgy; it may be said of him, as Sophocles says of Eros, that whoever touches him is at once thrown into delirium. Eros urges sexual union, rewarding and protecting lovers; Dionysus stimulates the reproductive instinct, loves pleasure, and encourages ribald escapades. In

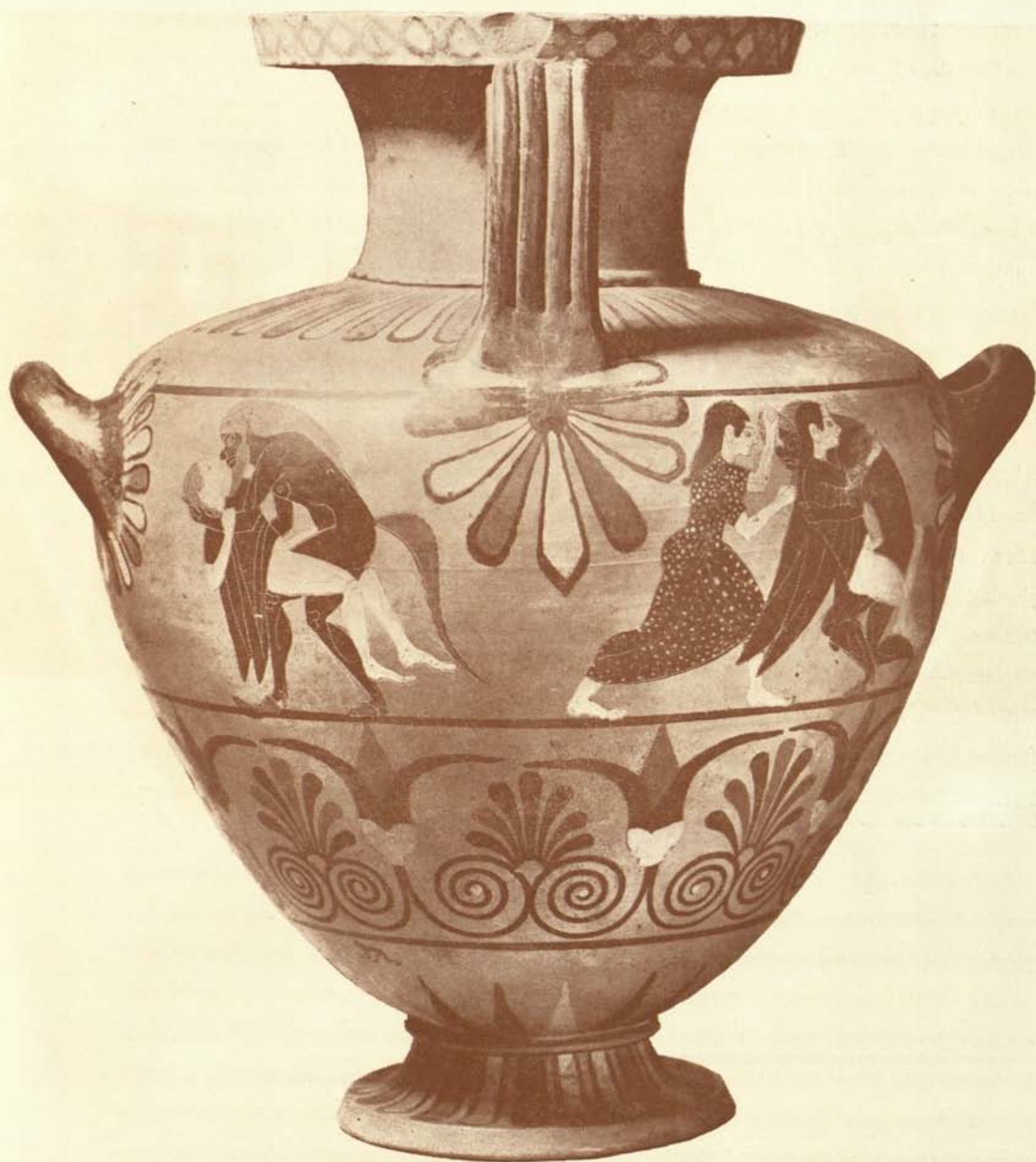




short, it is as though the fundamental characteristics of Eros, as defined by the most ancient theogonies, were taken over in large measure by Dionysus. Thus it is in Dionysiac imagery that the most “erotic”—in the current sense of the word—aspects of Greek religion are to be found.

It may be that the Sileni and the Satyrs were at first unconnected with Dionysus, but they are best known as typical followers of the god, their antics setting the tone for the others. Lewdness is their





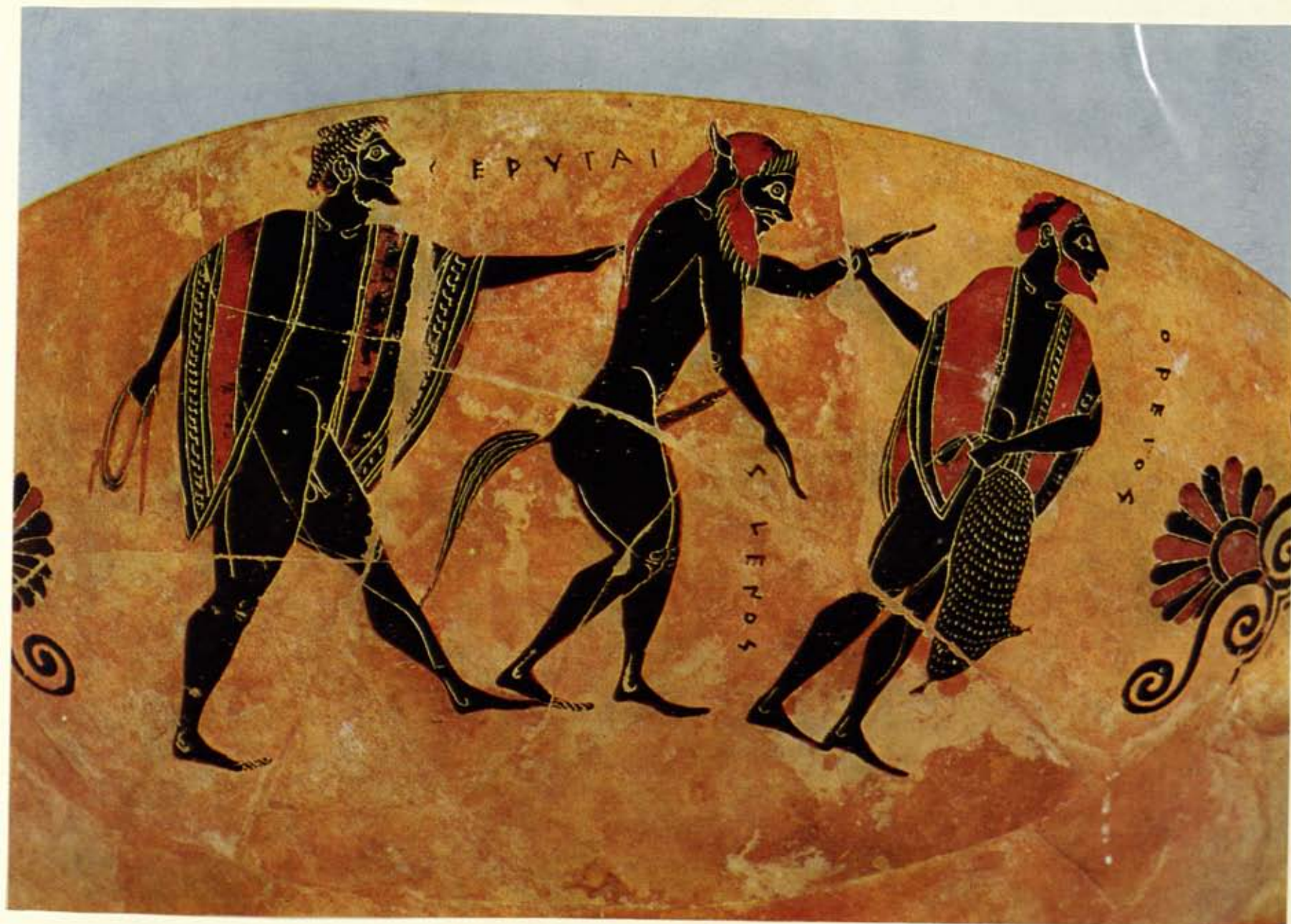


fundamental trait, and they were long notorious for their grossly indecent behaviour. There is no doubt, that from the 4th century B.C. onwards, their ugliness was not so much in evidence; indeed, under the poetic touch of Praxiteles in his *Satyr at rest* and *Satyr carrying water*, these rustic genii were transformed into personable youths, whose harmonious beauty, relaxed grace and faint mysterious smiles make us forget the pointed ears peeping through the cropped hair. The Satyrs of the Hellenistic age have the petulance of youth, but their amorous exploits are often awkward and fumbling and usually keep within the bounds of playfulness; as for Silenus, he is shown either in his role of "nurse" to the infant Dionysus, or else as the "ancient" of his crew, a small pot-bellied toper. However, we need not rely too much on these genteel interpretations.

In fact, the Satyrs and Sileni are very much like the "wild men of the wood" that appear in most folklores. Bearded, hairy, nimble, gluttonous and lewd, these rather alarming creatures are not content merely with seizing on nymphs "to make love to them in the privacy of pleasant caves", as the author of one of the Homeric hymns says. They not only have the bestiality of animals, but also some of their physical characteristics. Archaic portrayals show them with goat's legs, long tails and horse's ears. The legs soon become human and, in the Classical period, the tail grows shorter—in sculpture it disappears altogether—and the pug-nosed face gains in humanity. But the ears always remain animal, and the Hellenistic Satyrs sometimes have goatlike glands in their necks and incipient horns on their foreheads. It must, however, be remembered—in spite of the final metamorphosis which was doubtless influenced by the kindred figure of Pan—that the Sileni and Satyrs were originally hybrids between horses and men.

At the outset, then, they were similar to the Centaurs. Now, while some of the Centaurs in mythology were estimable creatures (for example, Chiron, the preceptor of Achilles, and Pholus, the friend of Heracles), the best-known legends about them stress their brutality and lewdness. Thus Eurytion plots to take Mnesimache, betrothed of Heracles, by force. Rhoecus and Hylaeus make a combined assault on the virgin Atalanta. Nessus, guardian of the ferry at the river Evanus, tries to violate Deianeira and is shot with an arrow by Heracles, who had entrusted her to his care. The monster takes a terrible posthumous vengeance; as he is dying, he tells Deianeira that to ensure the fidelity of her husband she must make him wear a garment dipped in the blood from his wound. The sequel is well known—how





Heracles eventually comes to wear the magic garment which causes him such suffering that he finally leaps into the flames of a pyre built by his own hands on Mt. Oeta.

Then there is the celebrated episode of the marriage of Peirithous. Peirithous, a son of Ixion and thus a half-brother of the Centaurs, invites them to his wedding; but, inflamed by wine, they spurn the laws of hospitality and seize on the bride and her companions. Helped by the Athenian hero, Theseus,

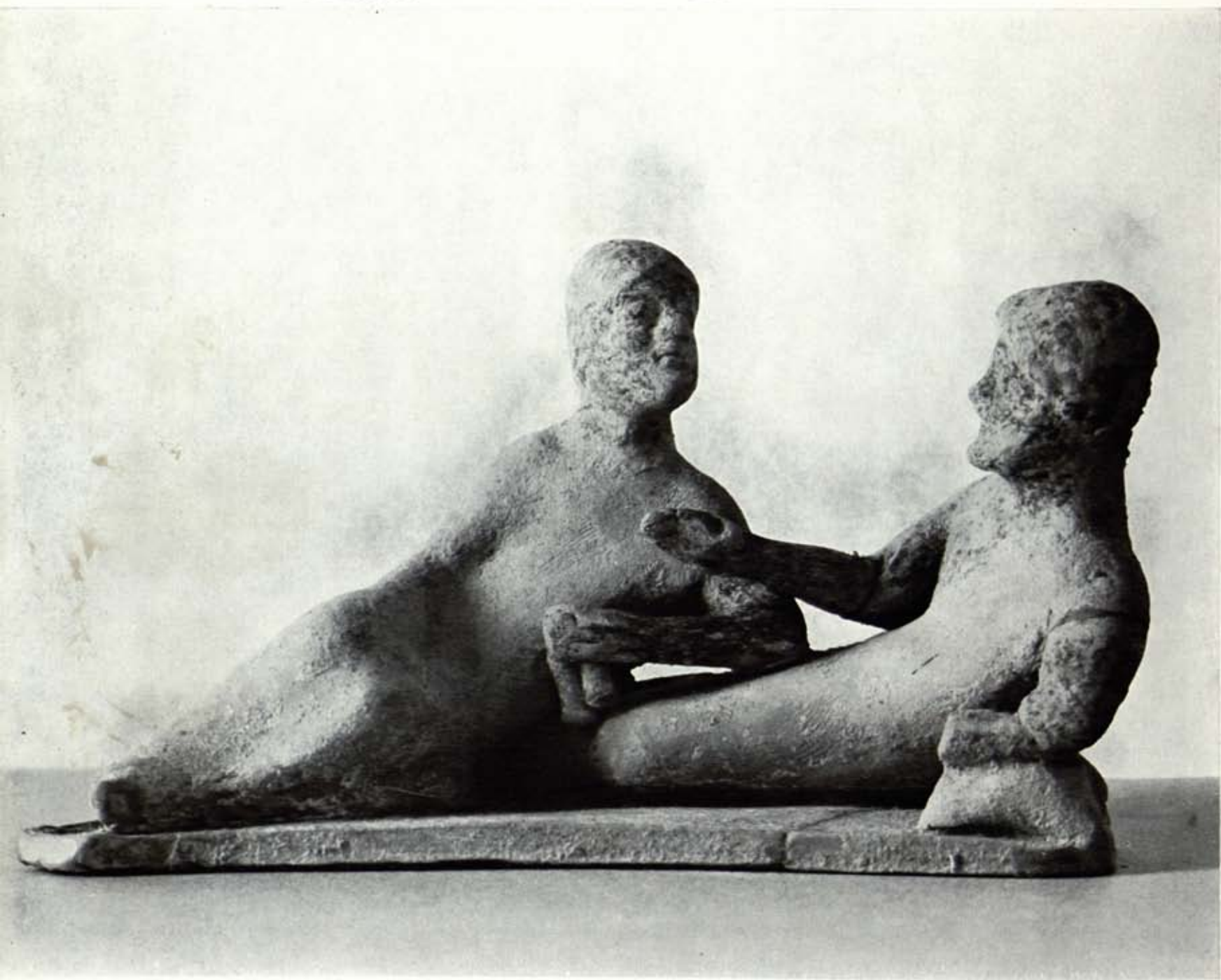








































Peirithous and his countrymen, the Lapithae, have to wage a desperate battle with them to drive them away. This battle is frequently depicted in Greek art, but nowhere more impressively than on the western pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. The surviving fragments of this sculpture are remarkable in their power and realism. Grimacing with pain and effort, the Centaurs clutch their prey, too inflamed with desire to let it go, even under the murderous blows of their adversaries. The veins stand out on their bellies, their arms and hooves cling to the women's haunches and thighs, and their hands clutch the women's breasts, ripping their garments, baring the coveted flesh. Apart from some portrayals of Satyrs grappling with Maenads at Bacchic orgies, there is little in Greek art to match the superbly frenzied sensuality of this work.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the passionate onslaughts of the Centaurs and the amorous escapades of the Satyrs and Sileni. It is not just that the Centaurs—human trunks attached to horse's bodies—are more markedly animal than the Sileni and Satyrs, who walk upright and whose sexual organs are like those of humans, even if somewhat larger. It is something more—in each case, the sexual ardour of the Centaurs ends in tragedy with death interrupting or following the blind frenzy that drives them on to love; whereas the instinctive sexuality of the Satyrs is consummated in bliss and is part of a whole joyful renewal of life.

Like the Giants, sons of the Earth, the Centaurs are outcasts: the presumption of Nessus is similar to that of Tityus in trying to violate Leto, and the battle against the Lapithae has its parallel in the great battle against Olympus. Irreverent as their father Ixion—who, not content with breaking his oath and shamefully killing his father-in-law, Deioneus, dared to covet Hera and unite himself with a cloud fashioned in her likeness—the Centaurs, like the Giants, are incarnations of the *hubris* condemned by the gods. In the centre of the pediment at Olympia, Apollo ordains their defeat with a commanding gesture, and some thirty years later the *Centauiromachia* depicted on the metopes at the south of the Parthenon, together with the *Gigantomachia* on those at the east, were to illustrate a punishment that might well be taken to heart. Although their features are sometimes movingly human and although the theme of rape takes only a secondary place, the Centaurs of the Parthenon are prisoners of their rebellious animal nature and, as such, accursed; in the convolutions of their fight with the Lapithae, they perform a dance of death.

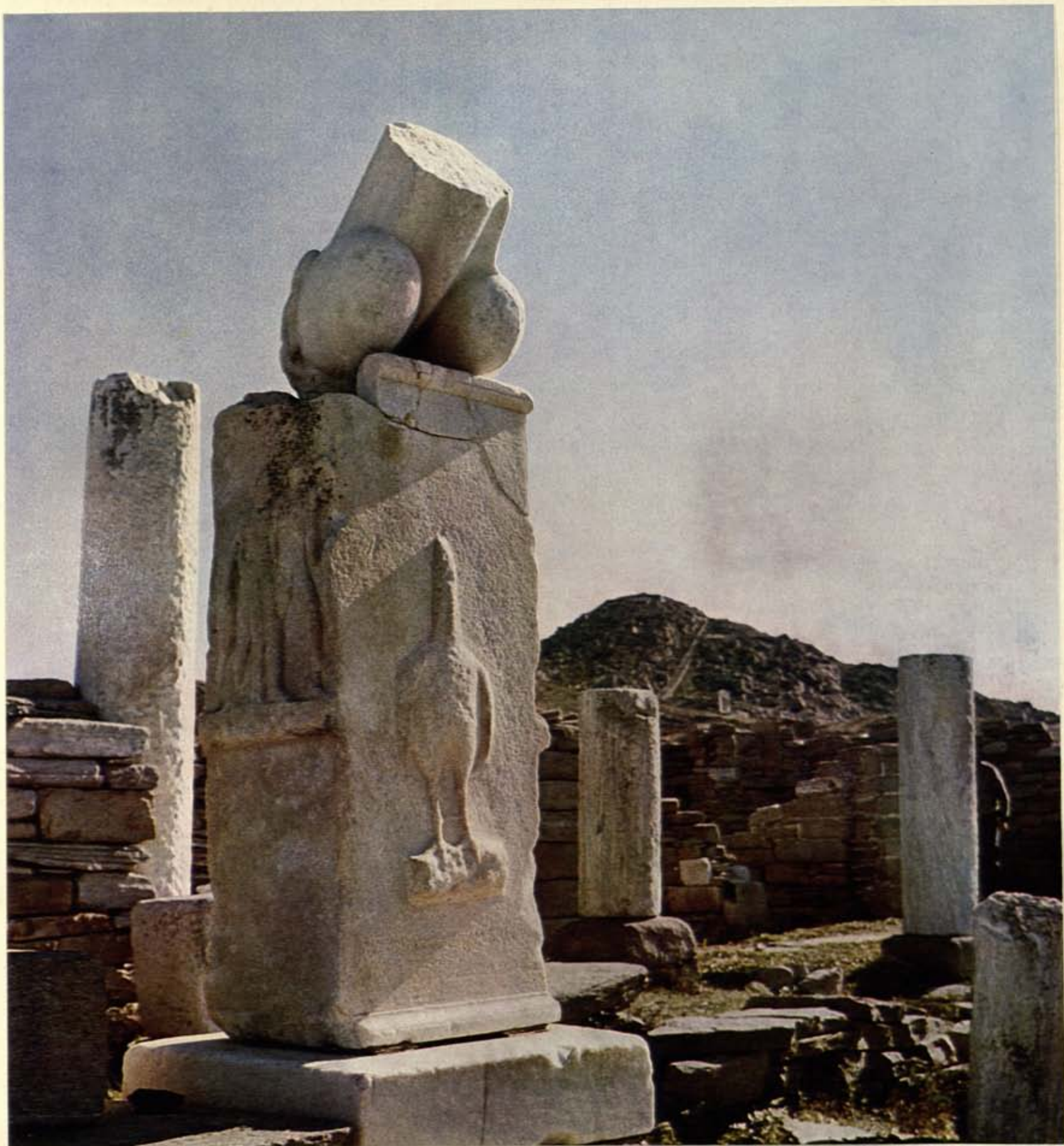


The Satyrs, on the other hand, perform a dance of life. Their bestiality is no longer an affront to the gods; for, while these creatures, half man and half animal, have an affinity with the dark forces of the underworld, they are part of a cosmic order in which the underworld itself is governed by the gods—in which Hades rules in the bowels of the earth, Demeter and Persephone regulate the cycle of the seasons and ensure the return of the harvest, Artemis protects the animals in their wildness and freedom, and Aphrodite ensures perpetual fecundity. Swayed by Dionysus and admitted to his train, the Satyrs show how seemingly irreconcilable opposites may be fused into a mystic harmony by divine possession. Notwithstanding their ugliness and the grotesqueness of their antics, their very frenzy and perpetual excitement are signs of a supernatural rapture. Whether performing acrobatics, dancing, or playing instruments, they are possessed with a demoniac drive that finds one of its outlets in erotic behaviour.

A text attributed to Hesiod links the Satyrs with the *Couretes* “who delight in games and dancing”. Their suppleness, agility and vivacity make their games as swift and lively as those of healthy young animals. They perch on the beam of Dionysus’s chariot, then jump down and—like cats watching a mouse—watch the white form of a nymph as she bathes; they push one another about, jump on a rolling amphora, and throw themselves at running animals, which they are quite prepared to assault sexually. They are lazy (except in the service of the god, for whom they trample the grapes and carry the laden skins at the wine-harvest), practical jokers, curious and amused about everything, including their own long beards, goat’s tails, and erect penises.

A psykter from Douris, probably inspired by a “satyr-play”, i.e., one of the comic plays in which the chorus of the Satyrs played the leading role, shows a whole group of them engaging in their pranks. Their chief, dressed as Hermes, rallies them on, caduceus in hand, but they have found some wine and are no longer following him. One of them is carrying a cantharus on the flat of his hand; another is kneeling down and leaning back to balance a large vase on his erect penis, while a third empties a jug into it. There are two winecups standing on the ground: two satyrs, standing on one leg, are trying to drink from the first cup without losing their balance; another is walking on his hands towards the second. Farther on, another Satyr is sitting with one leg folded under him and his body thrown back, while two of his companions pour the contents of a wineskin and a jug into his open mouth.







So much for the behaviour of the Satyrs among themselves. More often, they are found in the company of the Maenads; on these occasions their acrobatic gifts are employed in sustaining and prolonging the orgiastic exaltation of the dance. The leaps of the women as they solicit or experience possession by the god, their twisting and whirling, their convulsions and trances, the spasms that rack their bodies and tighten their grip on the thyrsus—these have their counterpart in the demoniacal dance-movements of the Satyrs, themselves possessed by the divine mania. It is they who set the example and give the impetus, developing the theme of the incantation on the double flute above the sound of the rattles and tam-



bourines. For these grotesque creatures have the secret of a music that, to quote Alcibiades in the *Symposium* of Plato, “provokes the state of possession and reveals those who attend on the gods and their rites”. Indeed, vases from the first half of the 5th century B.C. frequently show Satyrs carried away by the sound of their own playing, giving themselves up to the intoxication of music.

The indecency of the Satyrs is not so much at variance with all this as it might appear. Indeed, the satyr-plays dwelt with heavy irony on the appetites, as well as the cowardice and laziness, of this cheer-



ful crew—perpetually aroused, perpetually on the look-out, always ready to tackle nymphs, Maenads, and even goddesses such as Iris and Hera.

Silenus himself, playing the heavy father in the *Trackers* of Sophocles, does not think much of them:

“Impure beings, moulded in soft wax, the most cowardly of animals. The merest shadow, indeed anything at all, can frighten you; craven, negligent and vile servants, all you have to show for yourselves is a body without a soul, a tongue, and a phallus.”



But in the *Cyclops* of Euripides, when Silenus and the Satyrs, taken prisoner by Polyphemus, lament the over-long “widowhood” of the “little darling” that hangs from their bellies they share a common nostalgia:

“Yes, I would gladly give all the flocks of the Cyclops to be able to drain a single cup of wine, and I would be only too happy to jump from the rock of Leucades into the bitter waves if I could have a single moment of intoxication to end my frowning. Oh, to dance, forgetting misfortune... to be aroused again, to fondle a breast and feel with both hands the other charms that lie close by.”



The comic effect achieved a little later in the same play, when Polyphemus drags Silenus into the depths of his cave to make him his Ganymede, can well be imagined.

Obscene allusions are of course an easy way of pleasing the public. But it should be noted that the lasciviousness of the Satyrs, associated with music and dancing and sustained by the liquor of Dionysus, becomes—particularly when exercised on the Maenads in the orgiastic atmosphere engendered by the presence of the god—a veritable sensual delirium, a new form of intoxication and possession opening a pathway to another world. Love, as practised by the Satyrs, has a ritual element. Their *pas-de-deux* and acrobatic poses on the archaic vases that show them first paired off, then coupled with their partners may thus represent more than a flight of obscene fancy on the part of the artist. They may have been based, at least originally, on the sort of ritual dance whose crude vulgarity shocked Plato so much, although he did not yet dare, in his *Laws*, to condemn it explicitly:

“As for the Bacchic dance and those who indulge in such dances, where Nymphs, Pans, Sileni and drunken Satyrs are imitated and evoked during certain purification and initiation rites—all this type of orchestics is not easy to define as warlike, or as peaceful, or as what you will... let us just confine ourselves to saying that it is scarcely prudent and leave it at that.”

One might go even farther. When a Maenad on a classical vase fends off the unwelcome attentions of a satyr by poking him in the underbelly with a thyrsus (the pole with a bunch of ivy-leaves or a pine cone at the end that the devotees of Dionysus waved about during their dances), is she not really, to some extent, comparing the penis of her suitor to a ritual accessory? In the same way, when the flute-playing bacchante in a drinking scene places the end of her flute on the erect penis of an admirer, is she not more or less comparing the phallus with the instrument that plays the incantatory melody? One thing is certain: in the Dionysiac context, neither sexual erection, nor indeed coitus, has any shameful significance. It may cause laughter and joking as in the ribald amorous bouts between satyrs and nymphs, or satyrs and hermaphrodites, that occur so many times in Hellenistic art. But, erotic excitement—whether in men or animals—was too much associated with Dionysiac exaltation and fecundity not to partake of a certain beneficial and sacred character among the Greeks. The enormous erection of the *Silenus with cantharus* carved at the end of the archaic period on one of the gates in the rampart of Thasos is sufficient





























proof of this, since the carving is obviously of a ritual and propitiatory nature and intended to ensure the magic protection of the gates and the prosperity of the town.

But there are other proofs. The art of the Classical period greatly attenuated the monstrousness and lasciviousness of the Satyrs, but from the 5th century B.C. onwards, images of Pan, god of the flocks—also half man and half beast, a musician and a lecher—, become increasingly frequent. He is shown on vases pursuing young shepherds as they guard their flocks, watching the birth of Aphrodite, or taking part in the summoning up of the goddesses of renewal. In sculpture, we find him in the company of the nymphs, tenderly giving the handsome Daphnis a lesson on the syrinx, or even, after frisking with the goats, brazenly making advances to Aphrodite herself. A somewhat surprising ex-voto by modern standards is the marble group consecrated at Delos, towards the end of the 2nd century B.C., by Dionysius, son of Zeno, in the Establishment of the Poseidoniastes of Berytus: Aphrodite shows more amusement than anger as she defends her nakedness against the goatish god; her gesture emphasizes rather



than hides the charms she is refusing to her grotesque admirer; the sandal with which she is threatening him is a laughably inefficient weapon; and indeed there is a certain frivolity about the whole thing. But the choice of subject is more readily understood on reading in the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus the sacred legend—rich in scabrous tales—of the foundation of Berytus (Beirut) on the Lebanese coast and the beginnings of its cults.

A great deal might be said about the religious significance of the statues of the naked Aphrodite, so frequent from the 4th century B.C. onwards. Interpreted by Classical and Hellenistic artists as a gesture of modesty, the lowering of the hand towards the vagina was, at the outset, very probably—echoing primitive fertility idols, or under the influence of certain oriental cults—a shameless emphasis of her essential femininity. The famous Aphrodite of Cnidus, by Praxiteles, was displayed, we are told, in an open naiskos, which enabled the whole undraped figure to be viewed, in a sanctuary surrounded by luxuriant verdure. It is tempting to suppose that the nakedness of the figure was related to the cult of Aphrodite as a goddess of vegetation, in short, that it had a ritual significance. In the same way, Priapus, the great god of Lampsacus, was ritually represented as being ithyphallic, because this endowment turned away evil influences that might spoil the crops and worked by sympathetic magic on the surrounding plants. Priapus, who is the son of Dionysus and Aphrodite in Greek mythology, fittingly became a member of the train of Dionysus.

Things that appear indecent and obscene in modern eyes were of course not viewed in the same way by the Ancients. Pygmalion, in love with his own ivory statue of a woman, was, it is said, granted fulfilment of his desires by Aphrodite, who brought the statue to life so that he could marry it and have a daughter by it. It is related that a young man of good family, on seeing the Aphrodite of Cnidus, fell madly in love with it, and, embracing it under cover of the night, left an all too visible mark of his ardour on the marble. This was a religious statue, but it does not appear that the bestower of this excessive tribute was punished for sacrilege (he disappeared mysteriously, however, and it was said that he had thrown himself into the sea). On the other hand, the charges brought against Alcibiades, following the mutilation of the herms in the public places of Athens on the eve of the Sicilian expedition, are well known; these objects were pillars of marble, each topped by a head and curiously endowed, half-way up, with a—generally erect—penis.







### III

The hermaic pillars probably started off as aniconic representations of the Arcadian Hermes; they were sometimes erected on tombs, but their increasingly frequent appearance on country roads, then in the towns, at crossroads, on squares, and finally in houses, was primarily due to their supposed protective powers. Like the rustic images of Priapus, which were also often of an extreme simplicity, they were thought to ward off the evil eye, and popular superstition credited them with beneficial powers. Although Hermes never held such an important place in Greek religion as Dionysus, he had certain attributes that linked him with the Chthonian powers, the principles of universal fertility and fecundity. In the form of a pillar endowed with a sexual organ, he owed much of his popularity to the cult of the phallus,<sup>7</sup> favoured by Dionysiac ritual.

Whether they existed or not before the development of Dionysianism, phallic processions and consecrations of votive phalluses were closely linked in Greece, from archaic times, with Dionysiac festivals. In the 6th century B.C., Heraclites of Ephesus, in a text that has come down to us, remarked that if the phallic processions and songs were not in honour of Dionysus, they would be something to blush for. In the 5th century B.C., Herodotus witnessed Egyptian processions in which a phallic god was paraded and at once connected this custom with Dionysiac rites, concluding that the cult of Dionysus had been introduced into Greece from Egypt. In Attica, the most popular—and doubtless the most ancient—of







Dionysiac feasts were the Rustic Dionysia during which a large phallus was carried round in procession and a sacrifice offered up. The ceremony was followed by masked parades, at which animal disguises seem to have been worn and which were accompanied by jollities of a somewhat free nature. The first comedies of antiquity may have originated in such entertainments. In the *Archanians*, Aristophanes gives us a clear idea of the bucolic ribaldry associated with these festivities.



On leaving the army, Diceopolis makes his own arrangements for returning to the joys of civilian life. With his daughter as bearer of the sacrificial basket, and his slave Xanthias as phallus-bearer, he celebrates his private Dionysia. First he organizes the little procession, and then sings a hymn in which the phallus is personified under the name of Phales:

"Come now, line up... A few steps forward, basket-bearer! Hold the phallus good and straight, Xanthias! Put down the basket, daughter, for the beginning of the sacrifice..."

















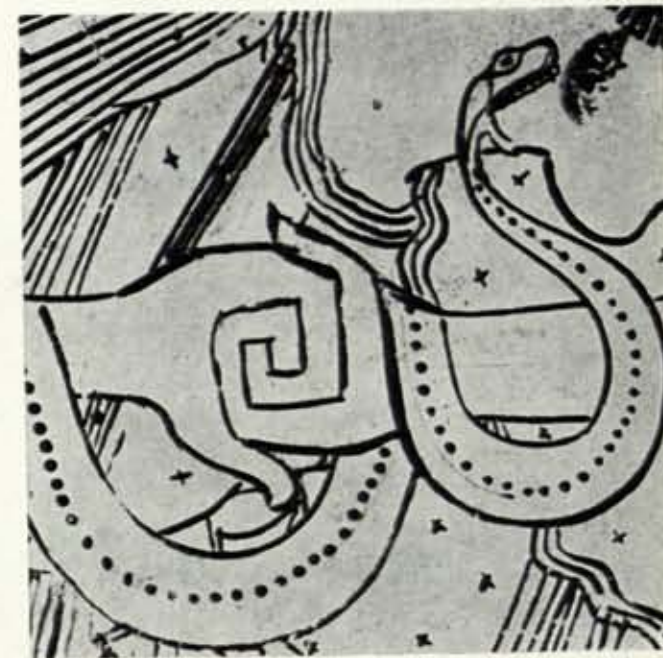
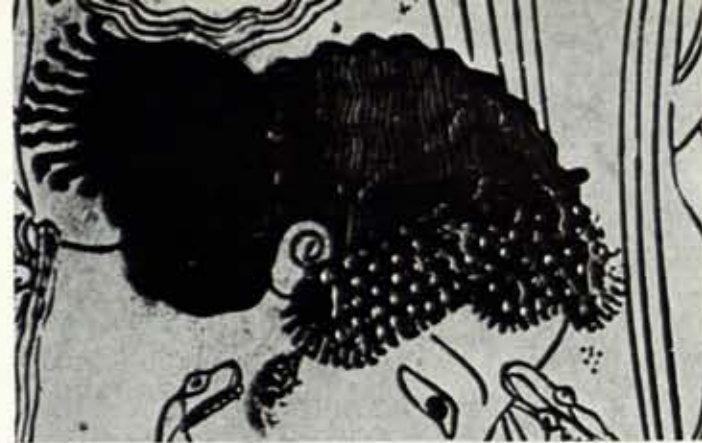






























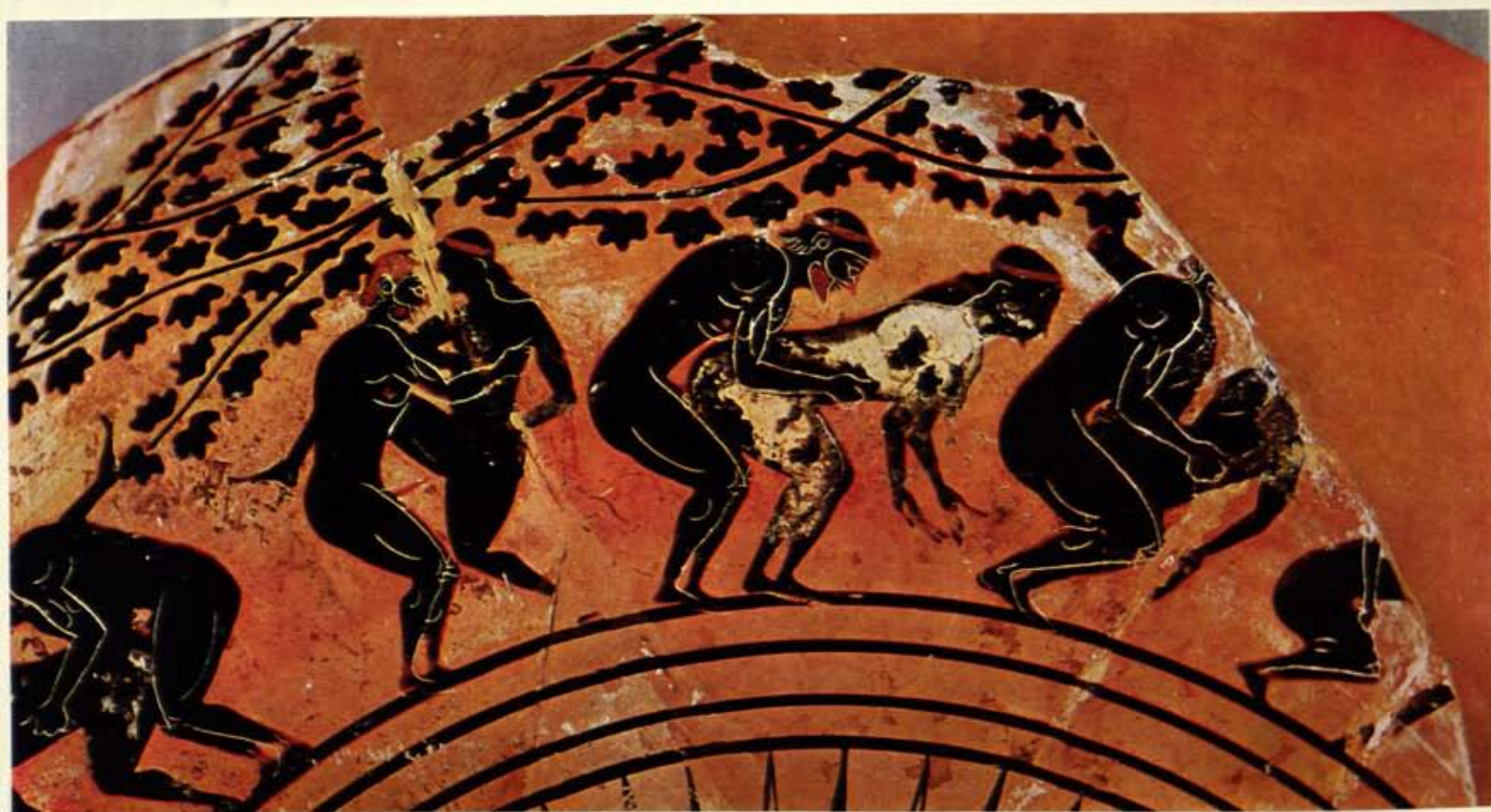
"Oh my master Dionysus, how good it is after my military service to be able to celebrate the Rustic Dionysia under happy auspices, with a procession of gratitude and a family sacrifice! May the thirty-year truce I have declared bring me luck. Come, my charming daughter, carry the basket with grace... and gravity. Ah, lucky the man who will embrace you and make you break wind like a weasel when you awake!... Forward march, and take care that nobody in the crowd makes off with your jewels. Xanthias, both of you must stand up good and straight, both you and the phallus, behind the basket-bearer. I'll follow, singing the song of the phallus. And you, my wife, watch from the terrace. Forward march! Phales, friend and table-companion of Bacchus, night-wanderer, adulterer, lover of boys—six years have passed since I last summoned you up with songs in my own village. I've made my own private truce and sent business, war and soldiering to the devil. Ah, how much better it is, Phales, to catch a pretty country girl ... among the rocks, seize her round the waist, trip her up and deflower her. Phales, Phales, if you will drink with us to get on your feet again, tomorrow you will have a good meal and we shall hang up the shield by the hearth."

In the case of the war-time ceremony organized by Aristophanes' hero, a single man was capable of carrying the phallus. But more usually, when the ceremony involved a whole village, several phallus-bearers were needed. A black-figure vase in the Museum at Florence shows a colossal version of the emblem, attached to a sort of sledge which a group of ithyphallic figures carry on their shoulders. Other figures—a paunchy grotesque, a Silenus mounted by a demon holding a cornucopia—are straddling the phallus and are probably masked participants in the ritual. The phallus is still very simple in form: a large wooden branch with the end cut to simulate the glans and a huge eye painted on the side. This crude fetish has bands hanging from it, and perhaps also strings by which it can be guided and made to move. It is known that a large phallus-carrying procession took place at the Great Dionysia of Athens; it is probable that the phallic image used there was more elaborate and more richly decorated.

We have some unexpected information from epigraphical sources, if not on the phallic image at the Great Dionysia of Athens, at least on that at the Dionysia of Delos, which was paraded on a chariot across the holy island of Apollo in the month of Galaxion every year. We have, in fact, details on the preparations for the festival and on the manufacture of the "agalma", which was never the same two years running. We can, by cross-checking, gain some idea of the growing complexity, between the 4th and 2nd centuries B.C., of this curious religious emblem. The basic element was always the same—a great



piece of carved and painted wood—, but over the years cross pieces, metal pins, wax and stuffing were added and, in its final form, it was a monstrous bird, a phallus with paws and wings, mounted on a chariot that could not only be pulled about on land, but could also—with suitable ballast—float on water; it could cross or glide down one of the island's rivers, and was perhaps sent drifting out to sea after the procession.



The unusual nature of the great Dionysiac festivals of ancient Greece and the part played in them by the cult of the phallus is amply demonstrated in a long description by Athenaeus, after Callixenes of Rhodes, of the memorable procession that took place at Alexandria in the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphos. Hundreds of people took part in this sumptuous affair, during which ten or more enormous sacred chariots passed in procession before the outrageously luxurious pavilion set up for the occasion



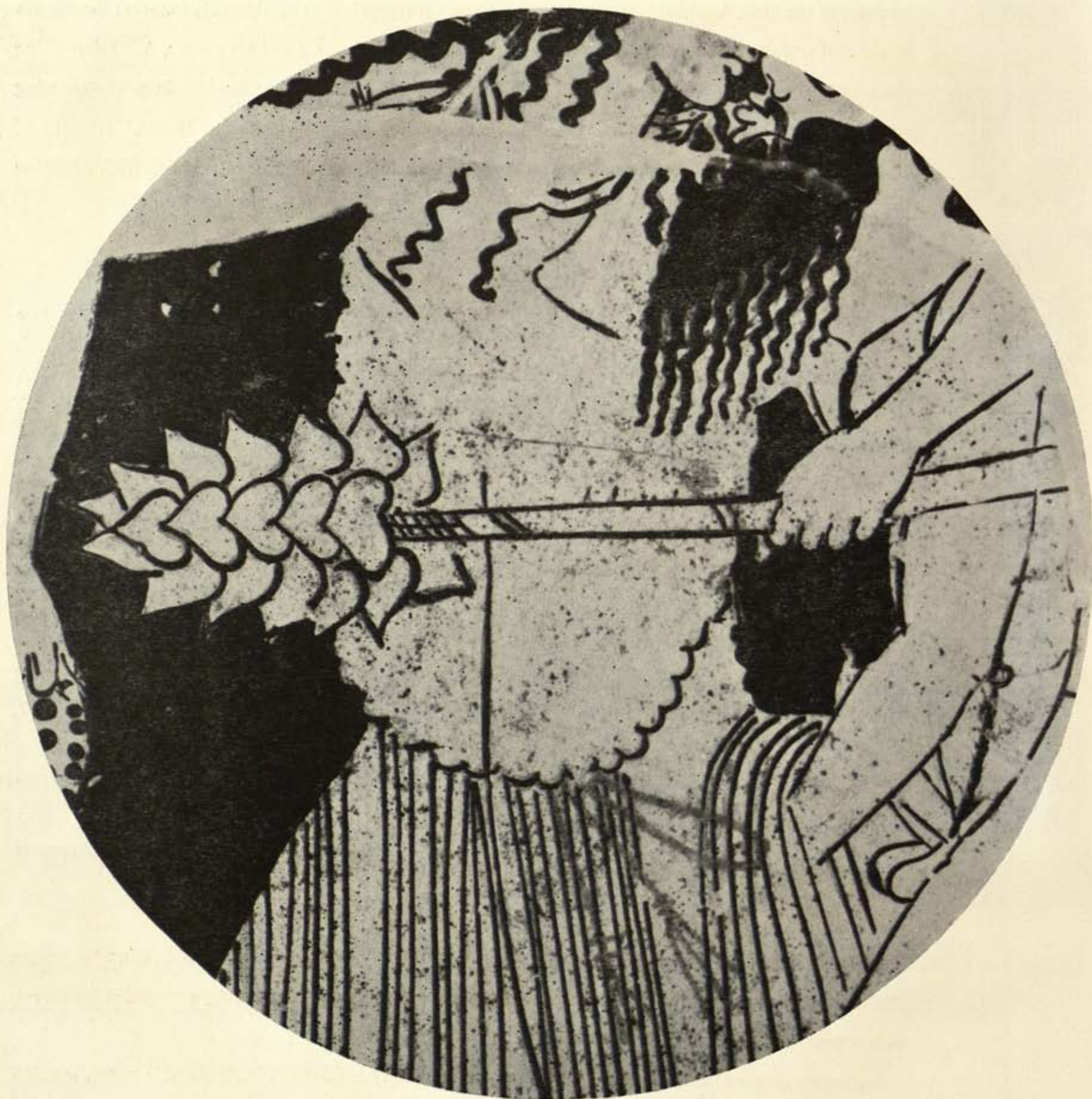
by order of the king. A veritable army of Sileni, Satyrs, “Ithyphallics”, and Maenads followed the statues of the god and the *tableaux vivants* in his honour, hymning his bounty and his power. After describing the countless revellers dressed as members of the Dionysiac band or—resplendent in gold—enacting scenes from mythology against a background of luxuriant vegetation, as well as an Indian “Triumph of Bacchus” with hordes of strange animals and exotic characters, the narrator refers to a chariot bearing



“a golden thyrsus ninety cubits long and a silver lance of sixty cubits” and another bearing “a golden phallus one hundred and twenty cubits long, all covered with engravings and hung with gilded streamers, with a golden star six cubits in circumference at the end”.

Such marvels were rare, but nearly everywhere in the Dionysiac temples fairly sizeable metal, wooden and stone phalluses were to be found. At Delos the choregic monument of Karystios, son of Asbelos,



























consecrated at the beginning of the Hellenistic era, has survived the centuries. On the front of the high square marble pedestal there is still a curious bristling bird whose neck and head show it to be the phallus-bird of the Delian Dionysiac revels. On the sides, it is shown followed by a double procession containing members of the crew of Dionysus instead of the priests, canephores, pompostoles and devotees who accompanied the processional chariot in real life. Below the pedestal, fixed to a basin, there is a marble phallus which was originally about a yard and a half in length. It is broken now, but it is obvious that it was depicted realistically, although the testicles were covered with downy feathers.

A number of other ex-voto monuments of the same kind have been authenticated in Delos, not only near buildings appertaining to the Dionysiac cult (of which there were several, probably along the route of the Dionysiac procession), but also on the so-called Terrace of the Foreign Gods, where they were offered by devotees of the Syrian Goddess. No less astonishing are the sculptured plaques showing obscene or grotesque figures—for example, a writhing polyphallic demon evocative of those lost Greek or Latin comedies entitles *Triphales* or *Triphalus* ("The Man with Three Phalluses"), or a phallus endowed with paws, wings and sometimes even a tongue, transformed into a strange animal, living its own life and with its own sexual propensities. Obviously not all of these are expressly connected with the Dionysiac rites or even religious in nature, but they are not mere meaningless flights of fancy. These plaques, set in the walls of buildings at doors or near the corners, were thought to protect people and possessions against the threat of the evil eye; they were also supposed to promote health, luck and prosperity.

Both religious beliefs and popular superstitions were, as one can imagine, catered for by the same craftsmen; these manufactured both the large ex-voto phalluses and those of normal dimensions for humbler offerings, as well as the phalluses for public herms, amulets worn on the body, ritual carvings, and good luck signs. The same coroplathes sold both cheap statuettes of the phallus-god—with a bearded face under the glans—and erotic groups. They also sold the obscene lamps that promoted and protected sexual intimacy, and the figurines of Baubo that were buried with the dead as symbols of the Eleusinian myth and the consoling prospects it opened up. Baubo, according to the legend, was the wife of Dysaules who received the grief-stricken Demeter at Eleusis when she was roaming the earth in search of her daughter who had been carried off by Hades. On her arrival the goddess was too cast down to eat, but according to the legend Baubo succeeded in making her laugh by striking a grotesque attitude in which



she lifted up her skirt at the back and the front; hence the monstrous figurines—in which head and belly are combined (the pubis becoming a dimpled chin), mounted directly on the legs and finished off with arms—that have been found in certain excavated tombs.

The ritual vases and funeral urns, whose decorations symbolized the transport of the soul by the gods, and the luxury utensils for less spiritual banquets were fashioned by the same goldsmiths and bronze-workers. The potters shaped the same forms for the satisfaction of the gods to whom they would be offered as for the pleasure of human connoisseurs; thus the sacred treasuries contained vases imitating the curve of a breast that were similar to the vases sensualists liked to caress while drinking—if they did not prefer to handle vases simulating the sexual organs of a youth or to sip from tumblers in the form of a phallus. The same decorators, often on the same object, represented the members of the Dionysiac crew and the excesses of the Dionysiac orgy, as well as the proffered charms of flute-players and scenes of a down-to-earth sensuality. Indeed the craftsman who worked piously each year covering the stuffing of the phallus-bird with leather may well on the side have supplied lonely women with artificial means of stimulation.

It is indeed difficult to interpret with certainty the real uses of those sexual objects that have come down to us from the civilization of the Greeks. Are those little phalluses carried or handled by naked women symbols or simply crude playthings? Are those bearded men clad in women's clothes and carrying parasols dressed up for some ritual, or are they figments of a perverted flight of fancy? And what of the two amorous quadrupeds depicted on one of those vases known as "choes" that were used during the feast of the Anthesteria? Were they intended to be a blasphemous parody of the *hieros gamos* or simply to demonstrate the ardour of the jackass, the favourite mount of the companions of Dionysus? What final interpretation is possible, considering that the traditions of the satyr-plays sanctioned the grossest obscenities in the theatre, that the example of the Dionysiac crew authorized every licence, that the gods and heroes of mythology abandoned themselves to every gust of passion, that religion and even—as we shall see—philosophy provided justifications for all types of sexual love, and finally that prostitution could on occasion be a way of serving the gods?

The hierodoules, or sacred courtesans, might well be called servants of the gods. Attached to a temple as slaves of the god it honoured, they could not be sold; their position had nothing in common with that







of ordinary slaves, and if they sometimes accepted quite lavish payment for their services, it usually went to the temple treasury. The idea of sacred courtesans came to Greece from the East. It is well known that thousands of persons were sometimes employed in the cult of sacred prostitution in the great temples of Phoenicia, Syria and Asia Minor. The male servants of the cult—for example, the Galles of Cybele—were generally eunuchs entrusted with menial tasks under a skilful hierarchy; the women, too, helped to keep the temple clean, but they were also musicians, dancers, and above all courtesans, the price of their favours going to swell the coffers of the temple. Strabo reports that at Comana of Pontus the majority of women who offered their bodies for hire, and there were a great many of them, belonged to the Temple of Anaitis. At Hierapolis (Bambyce), there were also a great many servants of the Dea Syria, and indeed all the Near Eastern divinities identified by the Greeks with their own Aphrodite were served by hordes of prostitutes.

According to a contemporary historian, the sacred prostitutes “were offered in completion of a rite of homage to the goddess”. In certain oriental cults, the act of prostitution itself became one of piety and women were obliged to prostitute themselves at least once in their lives. According to Herodotus, this was the case at Babylon, where every woman had to go to the Sanctuary of Mylitta and wait for a stranger to throw her some money and invite her, in the name of the goddess, to make love; they had not the right to refuse, and could not return home until they had done their duty. The better-looking ones did not have much difficulty in finding clients, but the less well-favoured sometimes had to wait three or four years before fulfilling the law. During the funeral rites in honour of Adonis at Byblos in Phoenicia, women had either to shave their heads or prostitute themselves to strangers on a certain day, using the proceeds to purchase a sacrifice to Aphrodite. In Cyprus there were similar practices in connexion with the cult of Aphrodite-Astarte. Religious prostitution flourished in the holy cities of Paphos and Anathonte; at Paphos, the client offered up a goat; elsewhere, he received a phallus in exchange for the goat. Sicily was famous for the sacred prostitution carried on at the Sanctuary of Mount Eryx; and Greece had Corinth.

Situated on the isthmus linking the Peloponnesus to the mainland of Greece, commanding traffic between the ports of Lechaëum on the Corinthian Gulf and Cenchrae on the Saronic Gulf, Corinth was an obligatory port-of-call for a great many Greek and foreign travellers arriving both by land and sea,



















and so naturally a great centre of prostitution. But as well as the ordinary street-women, there were the hierodoules. The Temple of Aphrodite on the heights of the Acro-Corinthus was, Strabo tells us, "so wealthy that it acquired more than a thousand sacred prostitutes, many of whom were offered to the service of the goddess by private individuals, both men and women. The city attracted crowds of visitors and a great deal of money; sailors in particular were only too anxious to ruin themselves there". They ruined themselves because the fees charged by the famous prostitutes were particularly high; hence the Greek saying rendered in Latin by the famous proverb "*Non licet omnibus adire Corinthum*". Strabo lived in the Roman era, but the ladies he referred to had, so to speak, acquired their letters patent of nobility long before his time, as can be seen from two earlier accounts, the first of which confirms what the geographer said about the provenance of some of the hierodoules.

Among Pindar's Odes, there is one in praise of Xenophon of Corinth, an athlete who triumphed in the foot race and the pentathlon at the Olympic Games in 464 B.C. after vowing that if he was crowned in the Altis he would offer Aphrodite a band of sacred courtesans. On his return to Corinth, he fulfilled his vow, and on the occasion of the sacrifice accompanying the offering he commissioned Pindar to compose a shorter piece of verse—a scolion—of which the text has come down to us:

"Most hospitable girls, servants of Peitho in opulent Corinth, whose thoughts often fly to Aphrodite, celestial mother of love, as you burn the pale incense upon the altar . . . With her permission, children, you blamelessly gather the fruit of your tender youth on your pleasant couches . . . But I wonder what the masters of the Isthmus will say to my mentioning prostitutes in the exordium of a honey-sweet scolion . . . O sovereign of Cyprus, Xenophon has led to your sanctuary a band of young women, fifty bodies sworn to your service, and rejoices to have thus fulfilled all his vows."

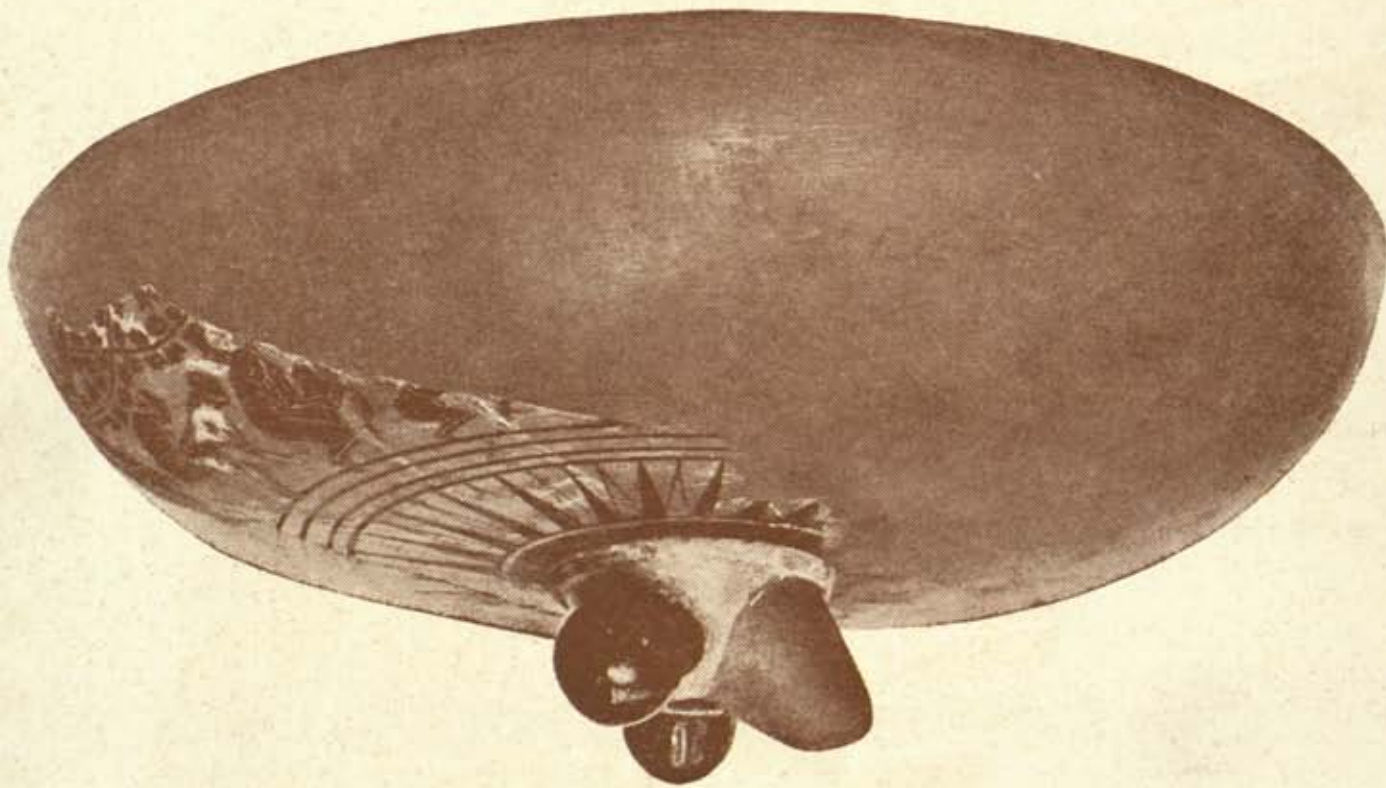
Furthermore, Athenaeus refers to the ancient Corinthian custom of having the courtesans pray to Aphrodite to protect the town in time of danger, and tells how these prayers were particularly effective when Greece was threatened by the Persian army under Xerxes. After the defeat of the invader, the event was commemorated by a holy picture that hung in the Temple of Aphrodite and showed the hierodoules addressing their supplications to the goddess.



The epigram was by Simonides:

"Before the goddess of love, these women made supplications for the Greeks and, above all, the valiant Corinthians. For this reason, the goddess Aphrodite would not deliver this citadel to the Persian archers."

The sacred prostitutes of Corinth outshone all the other hierodoules of Greece, but they were not the only ones. Aphrodite, together with Pandemus and Porne, was the patron of prostitutes; they could



appeal to her protection and call themselves servants of her cult. Many temples of Pandemus appear to have been founded by prostitutes. After the dramatic trial at which Hypereides tore off the gown of his client Phyrne to reveal her beauty, she was officially acquitted by the Heliastes as "Priestess of Aphrodite". Moreover her body served Praxiteles as model for a number of statues of the goddess, and her effigy was consecrated at Delphi. It should not be forgotten that the piety of the great courtesans was a generous one; carpers might complain of their ostentation, but the clergy and the keepers of the sacred treasuries had good reason to be indulgent towards them.







## IV

Not all Greek prostitutes were hierodoules, however, nor did all of them become famous courtesans trampling kingly diadems beneath their feet. When Solon set up the first bawdy-house, he wished simply to provide an outlet for the lustiness of youth, without endangering the social order. Because of this, the solid citizens of Greece were lastingly grateful to him, and their gratitude is echoed in the following passage from Athenaeus:

"Solon, you were a true benefactor of humanity, for our city is full of young men with exuberant passions that might spur them on to criminal excesses. However, you bought women, provided them with everything they might need, and put them in places where they would be available to all who wanted them. There they are as nature made them; no surprises, everything on view! Isn't that something? To open the door, all you need is an obolus. Have a go—no false modesty or coyness, no fear that they'll run away. You can have it now if you want it, and whatever way you like it..."

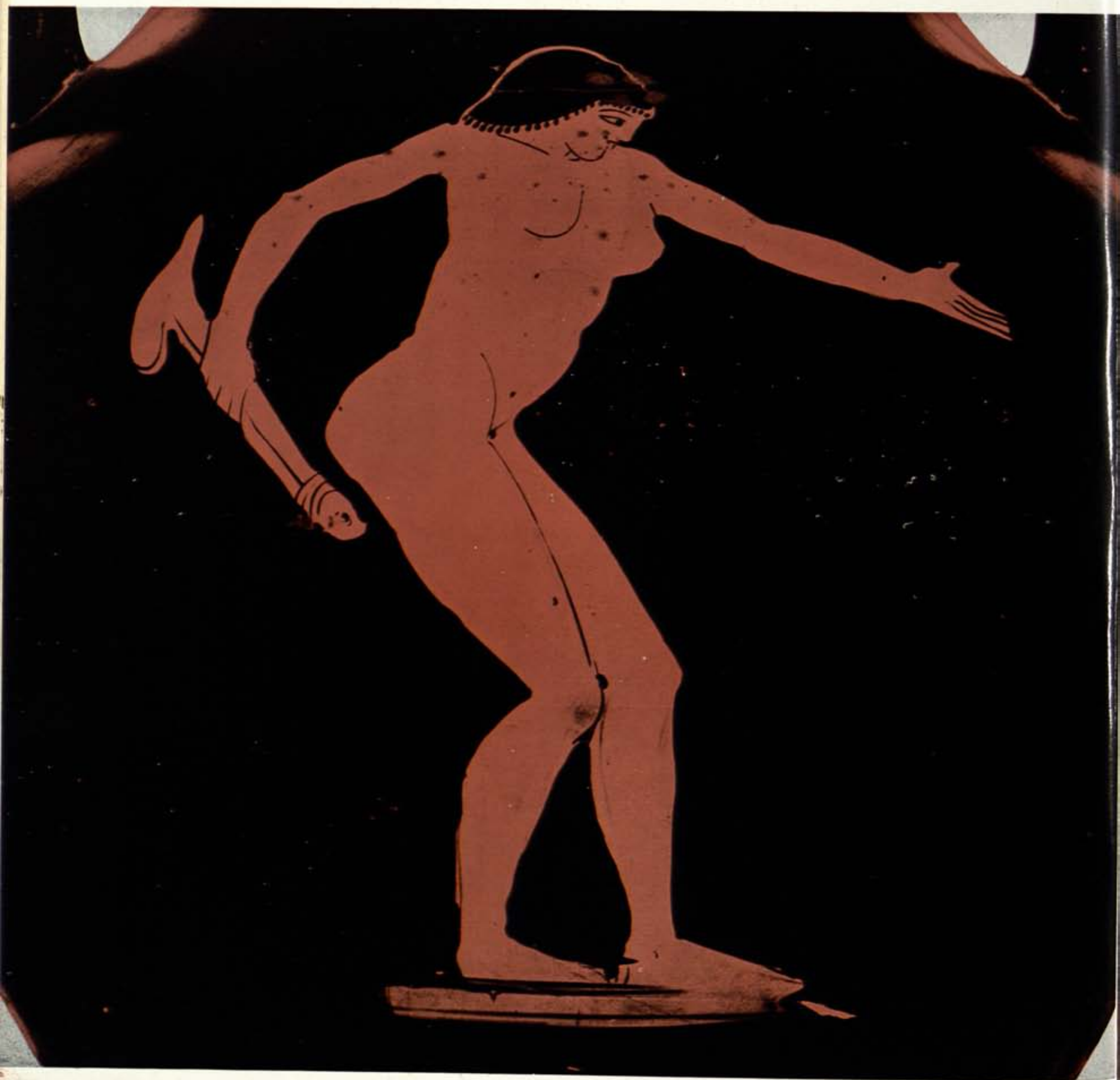
"These fillies of Cypris, built for sport, stand in a row one behind the other, their dresses sufficiently undone to let all the charms of nature be seen, like the nymphs nurtured by the Eridanus in its pure waters. For a few pence, you can purchase a moment of bliss with no risks attached..."

"There are thin ones, thick ones, round ones, tall ones, curved ones; young, old, middle-aged, mature as you wish—yours for the taking, and you don't need to bring along a ladder or sneak in through a hole in the roof... If you are old, they'll call you 'Daddy'; if you are young, it will be 'Little brother'. At any rate, there they are where anyone can have them without fear, day or night..."























































Less fortunate were the common street-women, who lit their lamps at night to attract passers-by. Subject to a special tax, the "pornikon telos", they worked non-stop as long as their looks remained, and finished up as hideous old hags. The name—or rather the nickname—Clepsydra, given to one of them in a comedy by Eubolus, suggests the hectic tempo of the young prostitute's life, the time allocated to each client being measured out like that allotted to speechmakers, since there were always others waiting who had to be satisfied too. When they grew old, however, only the egalitarian law thought up by Aristophanes in his *Assembly of Women* could have helped them keep their customers: "When a man wants a young woman, he should not be allowed to have her before he has pleased an old one. If he refuses and still hankers after young women, the old women will have the right to drag him off by force." Needless to say, no such law was ever passed.

Those who started young, with some natural beauty, could nevertheless go far if they had an ambitious mother or clever bawd to advise them. The great secret was to stress one's physical advantages, keep a cool head, and learn how to attract wealthy clients. There were a number of tips for remedying physical shortcomings:

"Is the novice too small? Sew a thick cork sole into her shoe. Are her hips too narrow? Pad them until people say what a fine rump she has. Has she a big belly? Pull it in with stays. If her eyebrows are red, they can be blackened with soot. And if some part of her body is particularly beautiful, it should be freely displayed."

As for morality, she should have no illusions. In Lucian's *Sixth Dialogue of Courtesans*, Crobyla, a poor and deserving widow, admonishes her daughter Corinna who has now reached the age when she can secure her mother freedom from need in her declining years. She explains that loss of virginity is no tragedy, that prostitution is a profession like any other, and that a girl who is pleasant with everybody, without showing a tactless preference for good-looking young men, can make a lot out of it.

"Well, Corinna, you can see now that it's not such a terrible misfortune as you imagined to lose your virginity and live with a nice young man, whose first payment I shall use to buy you a pretty necklace... At your age, you should be able to keep me, earn a lot of money without any trouble, have beautiful jewels and crimson gowns, and buy slaves to wait on you... To achieve this, however, you must not restrict yourself to younger men... You should be equally pleasant to all men, refuse to



cheat those who come to see you or send for you, but should not form any attachments... Some of them will not be so good-looking, some not so strong, and some not so well-built... These are the ones you should



sleep with above all, for they pay the best. Good-looking men think they are sufficient payment in themselves. Your main concern must be to get generous lovers, if you want to have people point you out and say: 'There's Corinna, Crobyla's daughter, who is so rich and so good to her mother!' "



A generous lover is a gift from Aphrodite, but he has also to be deserved, and Corinna must never forget it.

"How do you think Lyra became so rich? First of all, by being well-dressed and graceful in her bearing, and by having a pleasant manner with everyone. She never goes off into great roars of laughter like you do; but she smiles in an easy, attractive way... If an admirer takes her to a party, she never gets drunk, for there is nothing more undignified, and men hate women with this weakness. Nor does she eat greedily as ill-bred people do; she touches the food delicately with the tips of her fingers, eats quietly, and doesn't stuff her cheeks. She doesn't swallow down her drink in one gulp, but takes it in little sips... She doesn't say more than is necessary, doesn't make fun of the other guests, and has eyes only for her protector. And so everyone likes her. When she goes to bed with her admirer, she is neither shameless nor cold; her only aim is to make her lover happy. That is what men particularly like about her."

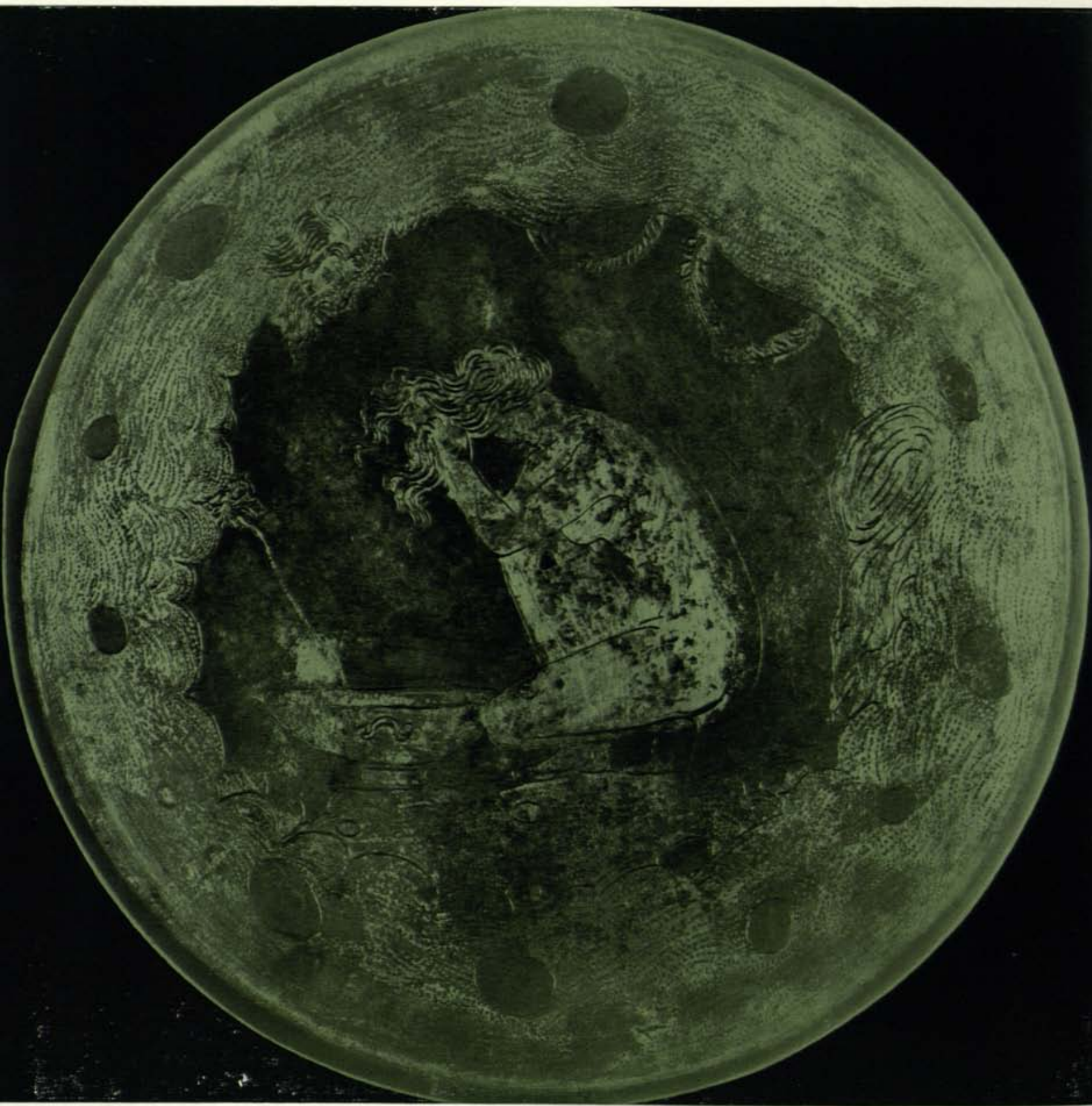
To find a steady admirer, it is not enough to buy sandals that print the word "Akoulouthi" ("Follow me") in the dust as you walk. To hold him it is not enough to make effigies of him or to efface his footprints. Let witches have their strange secrets and cunning charms: what a courtesan needs is to be carefully dressed, to have good manners, to be pleasant, not over-jealous, and more or less faithful to the man who keeps her in style—a kept woman could still bear without shame the name of Mnesarete, "she who is mindful of virtue". Also needed are good sense (a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, but a string will break if it is pulled too hard), psychology (a calculated coquetry can have the happiest results), and finally wit (a joke can often disarm an opponent and offer a way out of the most compromising situations).

As Agathon said: "Though a woman's body is weak and lacking in vigour, it can still contain a vigorous mind". Tradition has it that this was the case with the courtesans who became the mistresses of the great military leaders, artists, philosophers, politicians and kings, and had their names immortalized through being linked with more famous ones: Timandra and Alcibiades, Phryne and Praxiteles, Leontion and Epicurus, Aspasia and Pericles, Agathocleia and Ptolemy IV. To be sure, the vase painters did not use these notable women as models, but the simple hetaerae, the companions or lights of love of the gilded youth of Athens, must also have had a certain common sense and a charm that was not merely physical to have been able to hold their own at banquets where serious discussion alternated with the wildest licence. These women had their own symposia, their secret confidences, and probably their own

















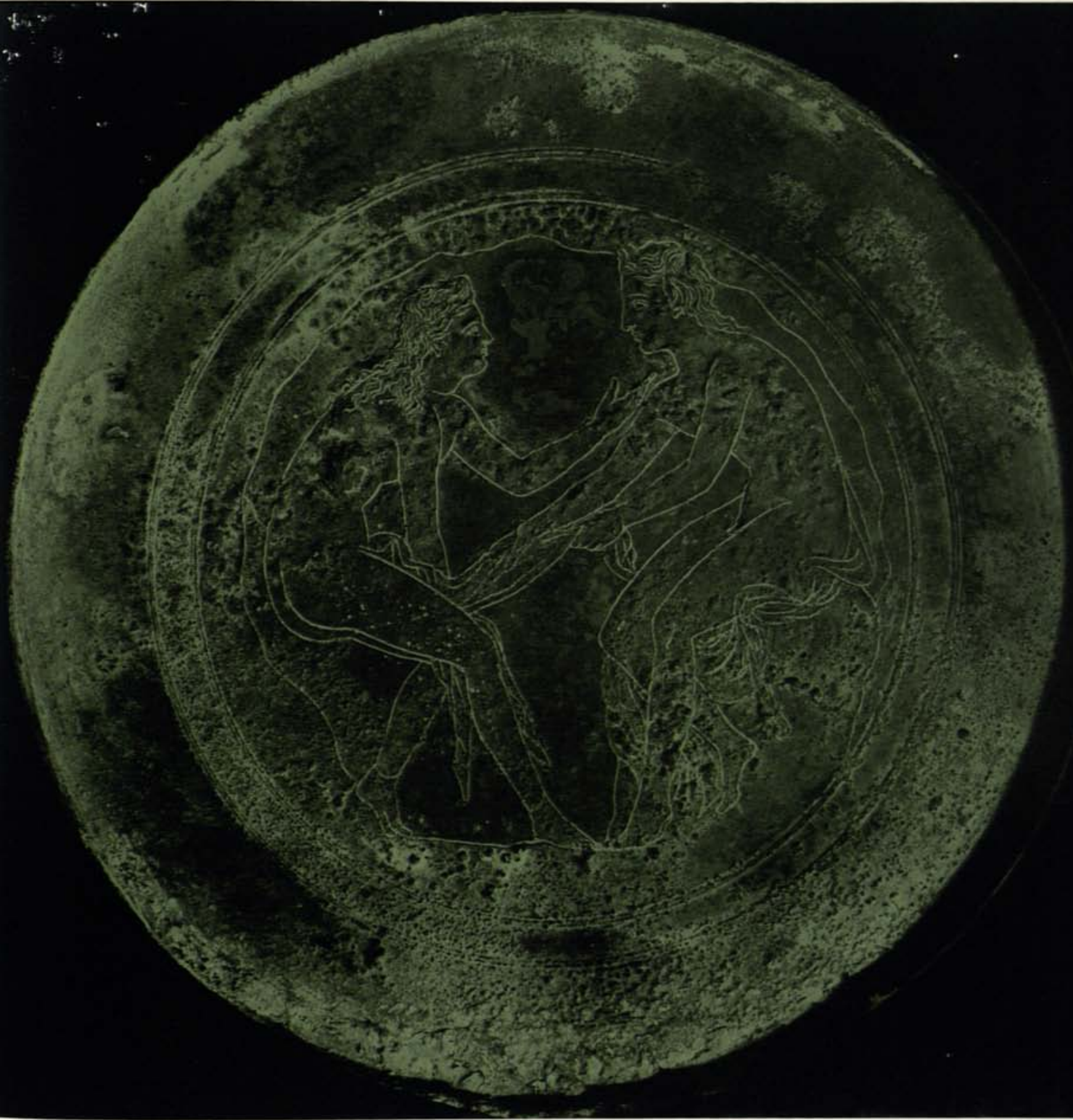


























little personal philosophies though few of them were initiates of the mysteries of Eleusis or had sat at the feet of the sophists.

One sees them as gay, somewhat romantic girls, each dreaming of her Prince Charming and whispering his name as she threw the last drops of wine from her drinking cup towards the cottabus; if she hit the target, if the little disc on its long metal stem vibrated and tinkled, it was a good sign and she might soon have the chance of tossing an apple to her desired lover and making the other girls jealous. In the meantime, they worked as "call girls", making the most of their talents as dancers, musicians, or mimes, indulgent to male desires, patient in listening to the ramblings of drunkards, and sympathetic to the failings of nature, for they knew from childhood how the parties at which they entertained might be expected to end. They had to be able to look after themselves and avoid getting mixed up in drunken brawls, thus escaping the fate of Parthenis in Lucian's *Fifteenth Dialogue* who came home one morning bruised and beaten with her instrument in bits. Though some might revile the flute-players who, "scarcely out of puberty, wear out the strongest men and see that they are very well paid for it", they were not so bad as all that. As they held them in their arms, their partners could imagine that they were Peleus conquering Thetis, or Theseus carrying off another Corone; and, at the same time, the flute-players might well identify themselves with the Bacchantes of the Dionysiac rout.

Their motto was "Cleanliness, politeness and pleasure". With their clean supple bodies clad in clinging well-washed robes (a number of medallions on winecups show them washing their clothes or taking a bath), they performed, danced, accompanied the songs, and attracted the ardour of the drinkers whose tipsiness mounted with each toast; the girls drank too, but not so much, for they had to hold the heads of those who were sick and help the unsteady guests to leave at the end; if such kindly gestures should arouse desire, they were expert at satisfying it. In the 4th century B.C., a maximum fee for a flute-player was laid down by law, and the police were entitled to intervene and settle the matter when several men wanted the same girl at once; but talent is surely entitled to sell itself to the highest bidder, and as for managing several lovers at once, that was a matter of health and temperament, though a number of vase decorations clearly show the various ways of doing so. Finally, if respectable-looking elderly gentlemen were sometimes involved with hetaerae, it was probably because they found more pleasure in their company than in that of their wives.



As the dramatist Amphis once remarked "A hetaera must always show herself more agreeable than a wife, and there are good reasons for this: however unpleasant a wife may be, the law obliges you to keep her. The courtesan, however, knows that she can hold a lover only by flattering attentions; otherwise she will have to go and look for another."

However seductive the hetaerae of Athens might have been, the lawful wives had only to employ the same weapons—coquetry, agreeableness and amorous skill—if they wished to hold on to their men. They would certainly not have approved the system advocated in the celebrated phrase: "Courtesans for pleasure, concubines for daily needs, and wives to conceive legitimate children and be loyal housekeepers." The social function and moral role of the Greek wife in no way precluded sensual ardour. Aristophanes throws a crude light on this aspect of private life, and his farcical exaggerations have a strong undercurrent of reality. His *Lysistrata* is the wife of one of the leading citizens of Athens, and the women she calls together to save Greece by obliging their menfolk to give up war are honest wives and mothers. The weapons they count on are "saffron dresses, perfumes, slender shoes, rouge, and little transparent shifts". She knows very well how to get husbands on the raw:

"Let us wait at home with our faces made-up and then advance to greet them, with nothing on but our little tunics... then, when our husbands are panting with desire, if we slip away instead of yielding, they'll soon conclude an armistice, I can tell you..."

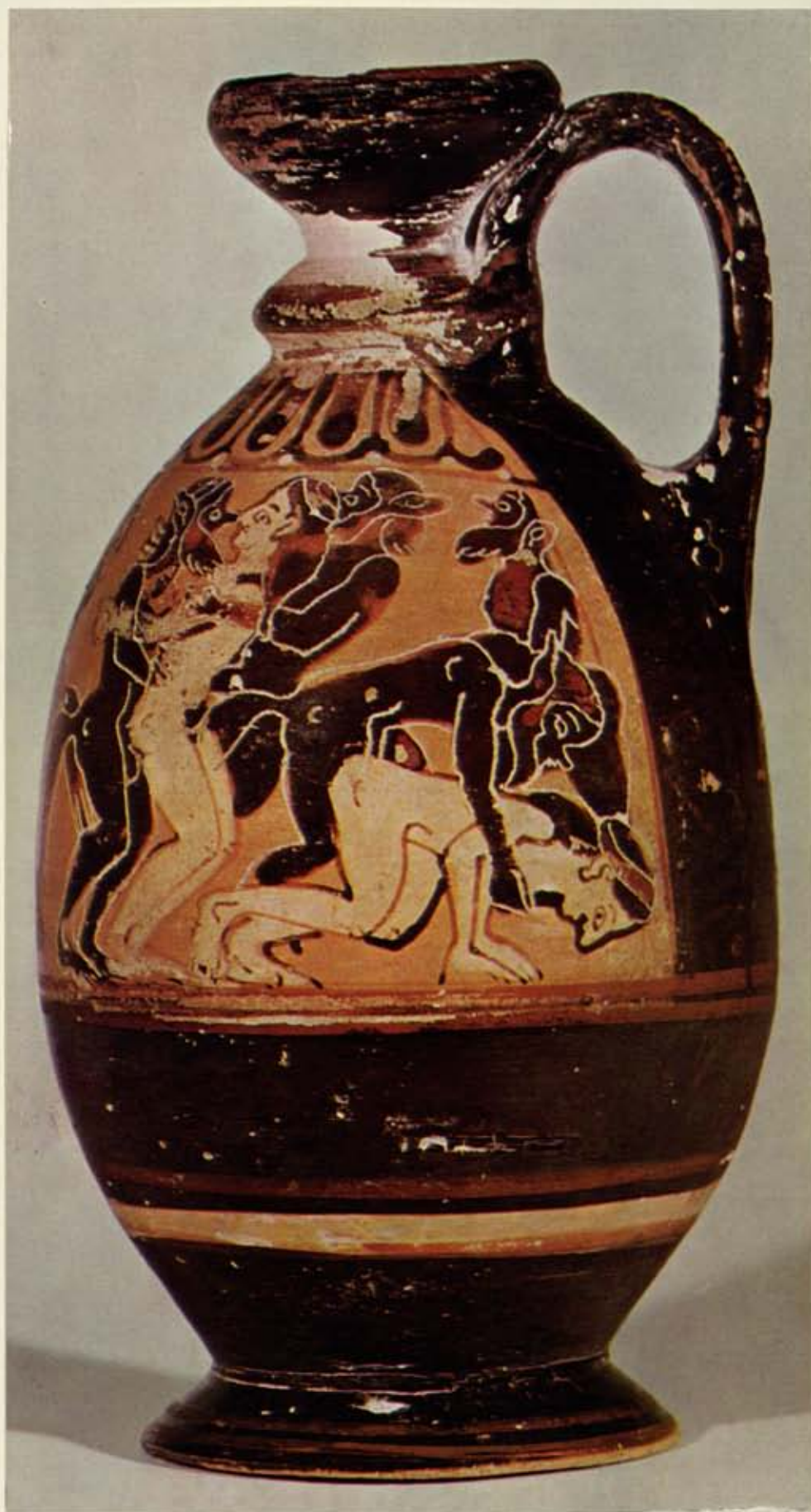
"If they take you by force, you'll have to submit, but do so with an ill grace. For there is no pleasure in these things when they are done by force... Don't worry, they'll soon have enough of it, for there is no enjoyment for a man if he doesn't get on with his wife."

"So no more legs in the air, and no more playing at 'the lioness on the cheese-grater'."

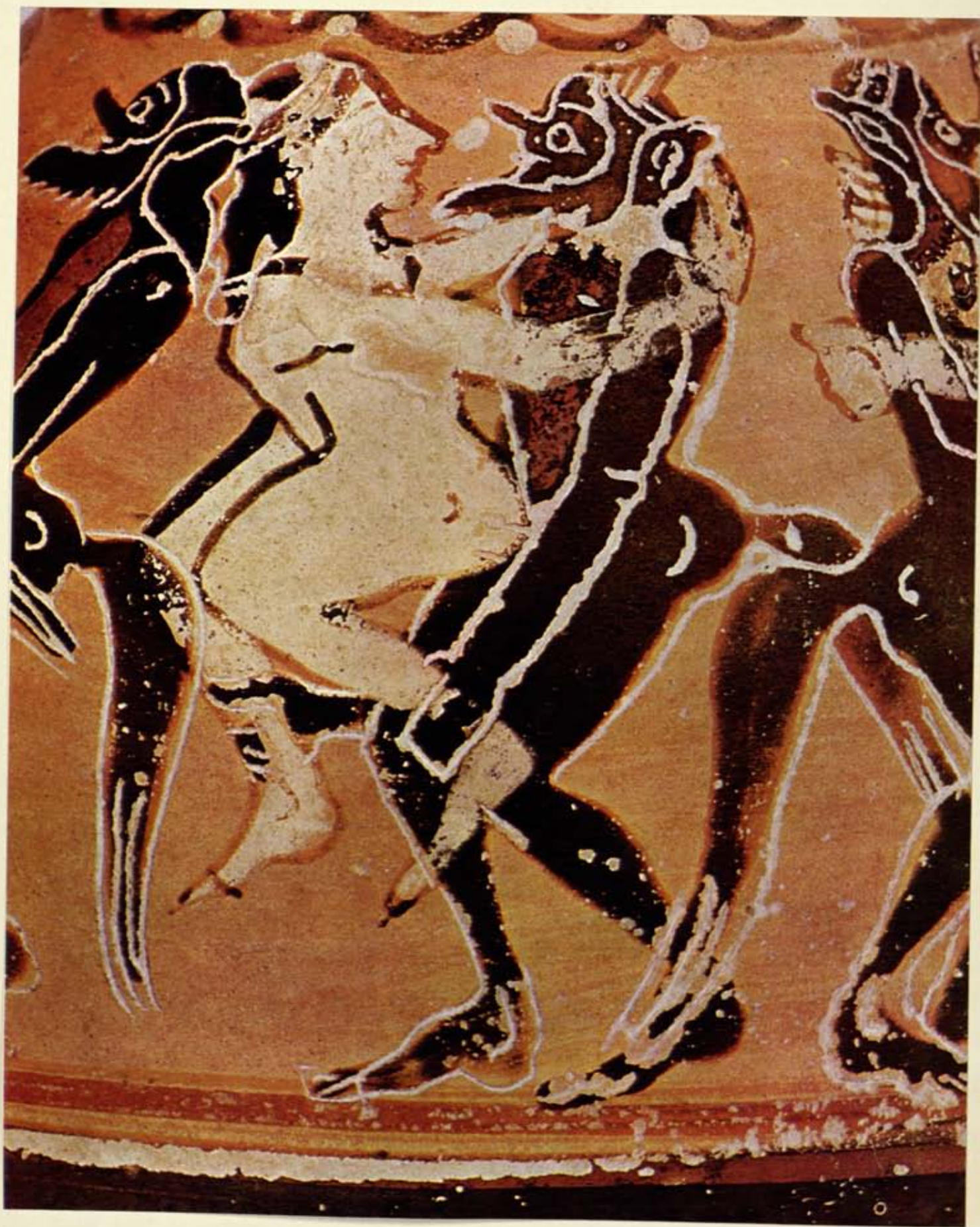
This love-strike is undertaken because married women and respectable girls are also made of flesh and blood, and are frustrated by the absence of their menfolk:

"When we should have been enjoying our youth to the full, we had to sleep alone because of the expedition. That's bad enough—but when I think of the spinsters growing old in their lonely rooms, it makes me absolutely furious... It's not the same for the men. When they come back, any of them, however hoary, will be able to find a young girl to marry. But a woman's season is short; if she lets it pass, nobody wants to marry her any more..."





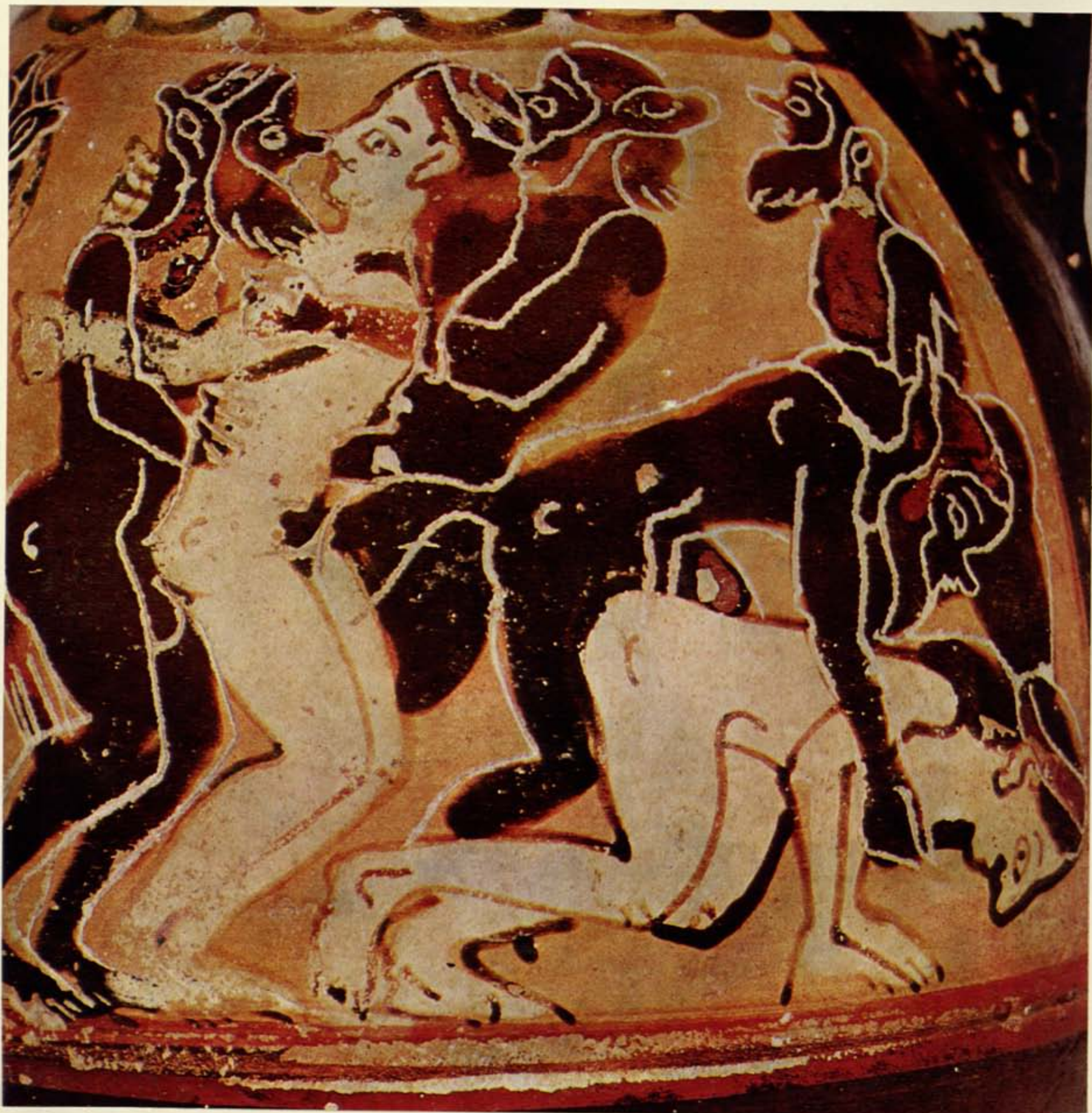
















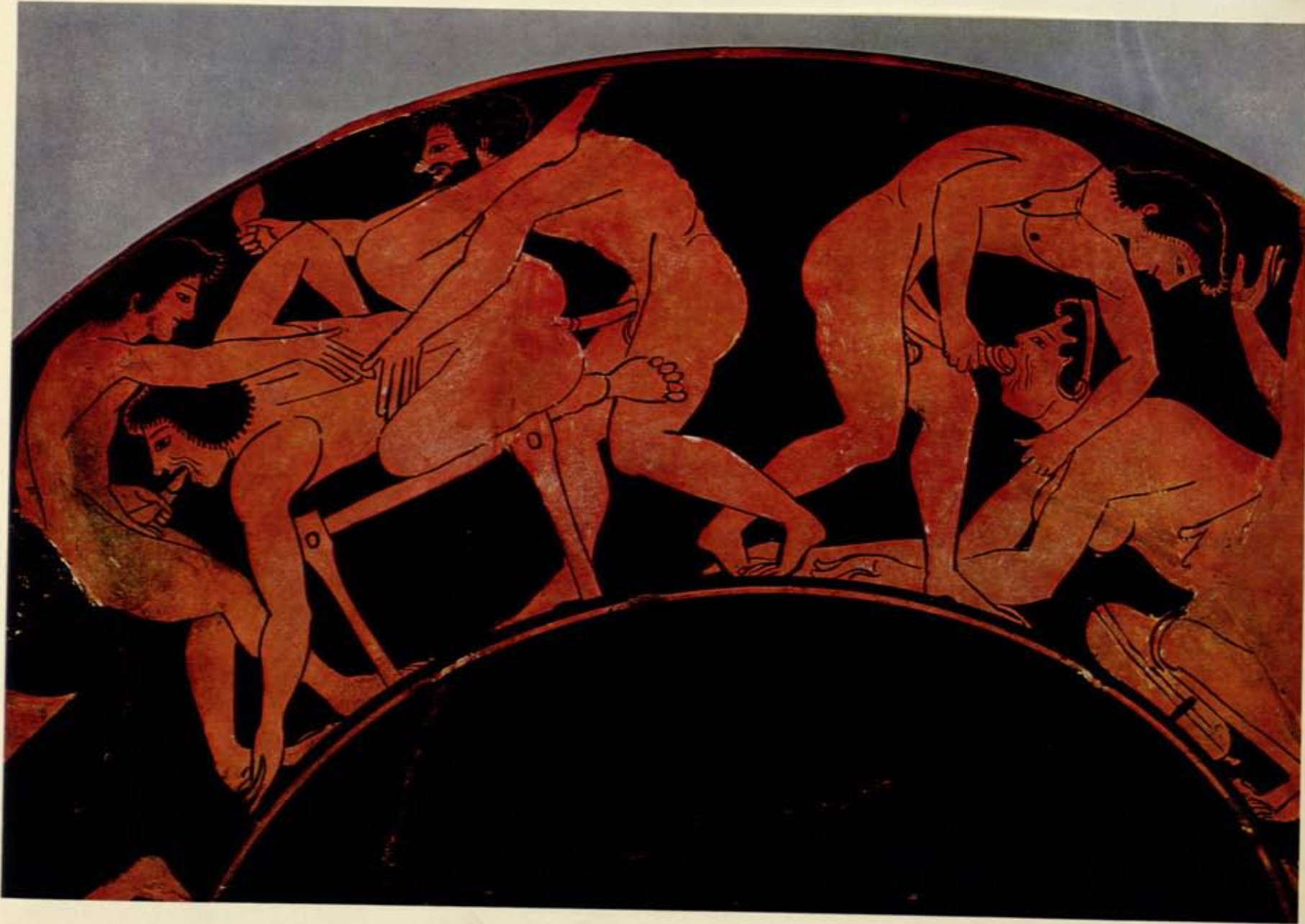


Lysistrata's stratagem is a risky one; indeed, many of the women find it impossible to live without men, although they have sworn to do so until peace is signed. But the firmness of the heroine and the loyal support of her friend Myrrhina, who performs a sensational but frustrating strip-tease for the benefit of her husband Cinesias, finally bring victory to the fair sex. Worn out with desire, the men conclude the peace treaty and the "orgies of Aphrodite" can at last be resumed.





Aristophanes' comedy serves to remind us not only that the Greek matrons were made of flesh and blood, that they made up, plucked their eyebrows and used perfume, and that they liked pretty clothes and love-making. It also reveals incidentally that, customs and morals being what they were (the men frequently away at war or busy with politics and feasting), they had some excuse for not having the patience of Penelope and—if they did not want to endanger their reputations by taking lovers—for









secretly using one of those artificial substitutes (an "olisbos" or a "baubon") said to have been invented by the Milesians.

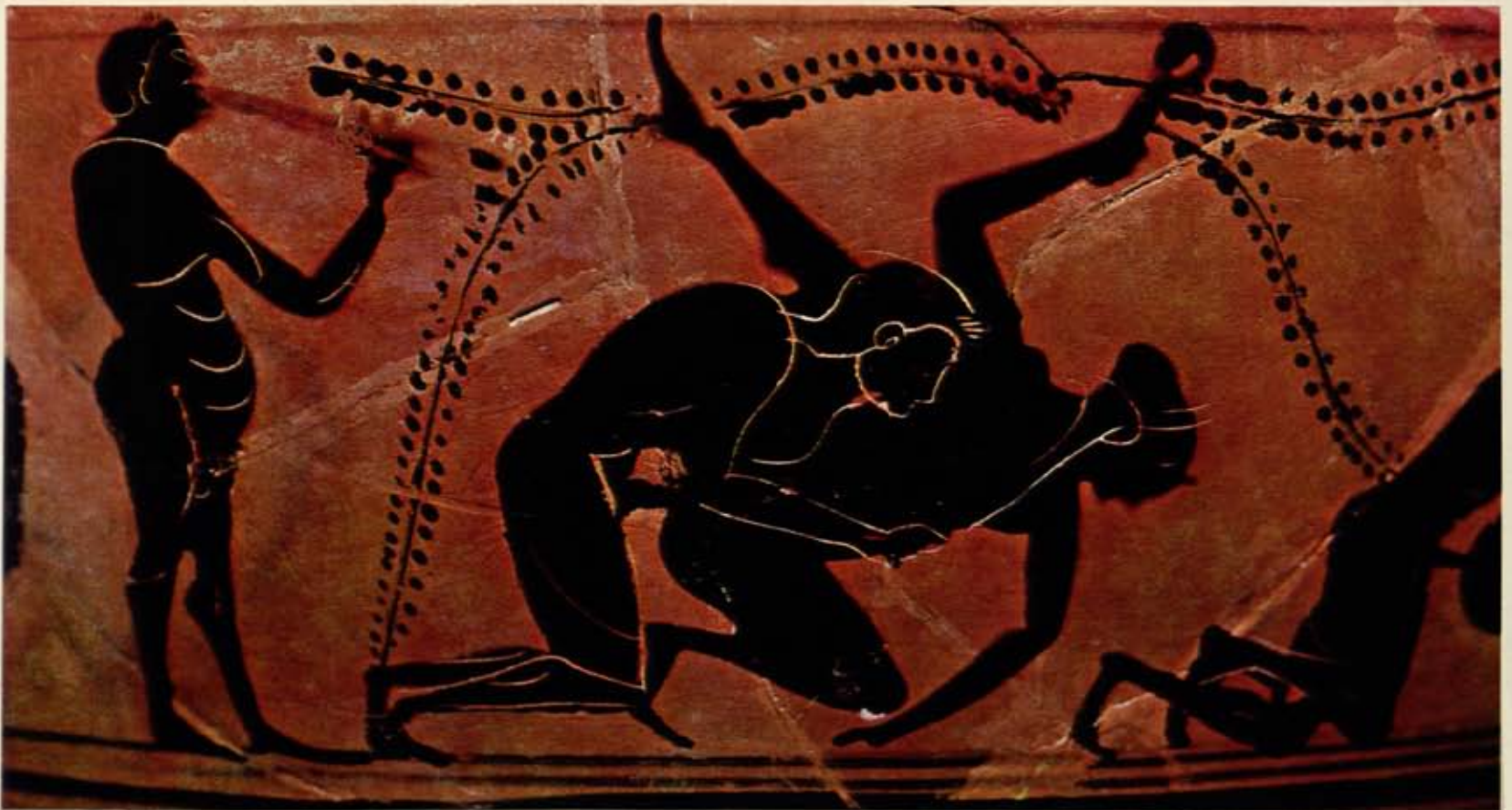
"Since we were let down by the Milesians, I haven't seen a single one of those rude leather instruments that might have comforted us," says Lysistrata.

It has been justly observed that the "friends" and "intimates" that appear in the *Sixth Mime* of Herodas were married women and respectable housewives. Their whispered confidences are concerned with discreet ways of getting hold of the instruments in question.

" 'Don't lie to me, I beg of you, dear Corytto; tell me who made that scarlet baubon.'

'Where did you see it, Metro?'

'Erinna's daughter, Nesis, had it the other day. . . please tell me the truth, who made it?'





'A man called Cerdon... he makes them at home and sells them in secret, for nowadays the tax inspectors are lurking behind every door... But what workmanship! You can almost see Athena's hand in it. When I saw them (he brought two with him) my eyes popped out of my head, I was so mad to have one. Men never achieve such rigidity (just between ourselves). But it's not only that, it's the softness too, heavenly! You'd think the fastenings were of wool, but they're leather. No, you couldn't find a better cobbler for a woman.'

'But how did this man Cerdon know about you, Corytto?'

'Artemis sent him to me—the wife of Candas the currier—she gave him my address.'

'Artemis is always on to some new discovery. I must go there right now to see where I can get hold of Cerdon.' "

The same instrument could be used for relations between women, but female homosexuality does not seem to have been very widespread in Greece, although we find a vivid picture of it in the *Fifth Dialogue of Courtesans*, in which Leaina tells Clonarion of her adventures with Megilla, a rich woman from Lesbos.

"She and Demonasse from Corinth were giving a party, and I was asked along to sing and play the zither during the meal. When I had finished singing and it was bedtime, Megilla—who had been drinking heavily with her friend—said to me: 'Come on, Leaina, you need a good sleep; you can lie between the two of us...' They kissed me like men, not only using their lips but half-opening their mouths and kissing my breasts; Demonasse even bit me. I began to wonder what all this was leading to. Finally Megilla, all worked up, took off her wig and showed herself completely naked, her head shaved like an athlete's, and this gave me even more of a shock. Then she said, 'Well, have you ever seen a finer boy?' 'I don't see anything that looks like a boy, Megilla!' 'Don't be rude,' she said, 'My name isn't Megilla, but Megel; and I have been married to Demonasse for a long time; she is my wife.' I began to laugh at that and said: 'But have you all a man has, and can you be a husband to Demonasse?' 'No,' she replied, 'but I don't need that, and if you like to try I can show you that I have all it needs to satisfy you.' 'Are you a hermaphrodite, then?' 'No,' she answered, 'I was born like the rest of you; but I have the tastes and desires of a man... Let me show you, Leaina, if you don't believe me...' I gave in, Clonarion; especially as she gave me a necklace and a lovely dress. I took her in my arms as though she were a man; she kissed me and seemed to get a great thrill from it... As for the rest, don't ask me any more. It's not very nice. By Aphrodite, I shan't tell you about it.' "

Leaina's reticence is probably quite genuine, and the fact that Megilla was said to come from Lesbos suggests that female homosexuality, from the time of Sappho onwards, was considered to be a speciality











of the island. For, of course, it was there that Sappho had her famous women's college, the "house of the handmaidens of the Muses", under the protection of the Graces and of Aphrodite—the same Sappho whose poems of burning passion and jealousy hymned the beauty of Anactoria, Mnasicca and Gongyla. Yet, according to tradition, Sappho was a wife and mother and committed suicide by jumping into the sea from the cliff of Leucades for love of the handsome Phaon. Thus she was hardly the apostle of a special form of love, and female homosexuality does not appear to have been so hotly defended in Greece as was male homosexuality.

## V

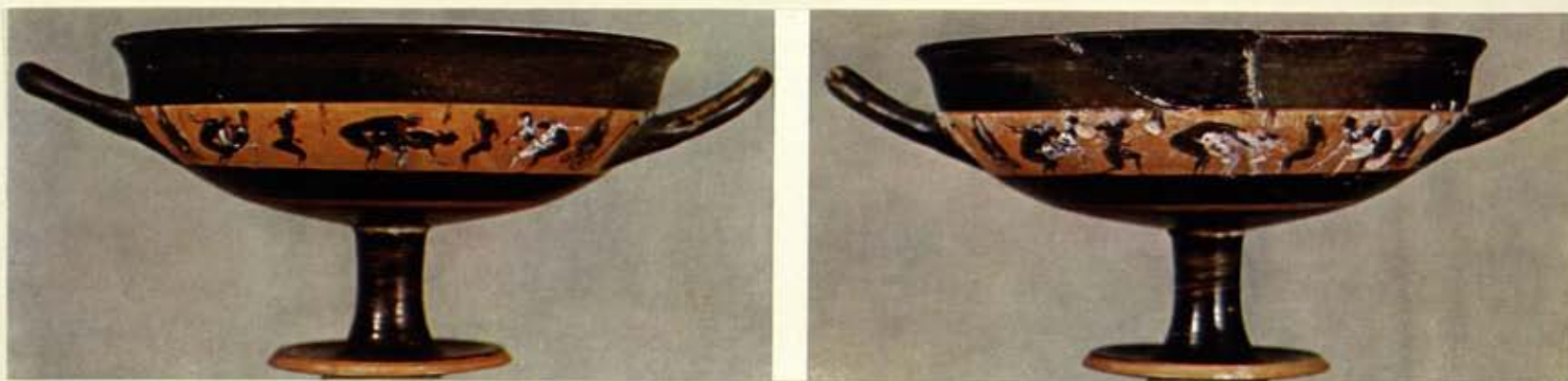
To practise "labda" or satisfy oneself with "Orthagoras" were generally regarded by the Greeks as makeshift measures. Not so, the love of boys.

This is shown by the vase paintings. When there are two pictures on a vase, one may deal with lovers of mythology or the Dionysiac crew and the other with a scene from real life, but paederastic themes are never balanced by Lesbian themes. Instead the two conceptions of male love are shown: the love of men for women, and the love of men for boys. On one side, we see youths paying court to hetaerae, buying their favours with necklaces or other gifts, holding them close, and caressing and kissing them; on the other, men—usually bearded—presenting youths with hares or cockerels, holding them close, and



caressing and kissing them. As well as vases unabashedly depicting heterosexual love, there are vases showing men in bed with boys, but as far as I am aware not a single one showing women making love to one another. The traditional antithesis of Sodom and Gomorrah does not apply here, and by “Greek love” only male homosexuality was understood.

Considered specifically as “Greek morals” by the Greek authors themselves, as for example Herodotus and Xenophon, the love of boys—paederasty—was dealt with by writers as a form of love that paralleled heterosexual love in every way. It also had its counterparts in mythology: first Zeus enamoured of



Ganymede, then Apollo falling in love with Hyacinthus, killing him by accident, and changing the blood from his wound into a new flower. (According to another tradition it was for love of the same Hyacinthus that Thamyris, son of Philammon and the nymph Argiope, invented paederasty.) Epic poetry idealized the perfect friendship of Achilles and Patrocles, just as the drama idealized that of Orestes and Pylades: no doubt their friendship was at first free from carnality, but in the end they became the prototype of all male couples. The Athenians honoured the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogiton as national heroes and considered the murder of Hipparchus, son of Pisistrates, as both a political act and a lover's revenge, because Hipparchus had made advances to Harmodius who was Aristogiton's lover. Paederasty had its sanctioners, its exemplars, and even its martyrs.







In social life its rights were recognized and its abuses criticized more or less in the same way as those of normal love. There were brothels for paederasts, and male prostitutes were just as subject to the "pornikon telos" as their female counterparts. On the stage, there were the same jokes about the pitiful homosexuals soliciting in the streets as about the pathetic drabs of the crossroads. There were laws to restrict public debauchery and to punish violence and the shameful exploitation of children by their parents; Athenian citizens who prostituted themselves were deprived of their civic rights; and in short male prostitutes were treated on the same level as female ones. To love a handsome and respectable youth was in no way degrading, and Aeschines was not the only to consider such love as "the sign of a sensitive and generous soul," while Sophocles and Plato were held in no less respect because of their well-known predilection for boys.

I do not think there is any fundamental contradiction between the two oft-quoted passages from Aristophanes, in the first of which the poet deplores the fact that the young no longer learn proper decorum, and in the second of which he is extremely outspoken about the homage due to the beauty of a boy.

"In the old days, the gymnastics teacher made the boys sit with their legs outstretched so as to hide anything shocking from the onlooker; then when they got up they had to smoothe out the sand and take care that lovers would see no trace of their virility. None of them rubbed themselves with oil beneath the navel to encourage the growth of a fresh and tender down like that on quinces. No-one approached his lover with cooing tones or eyed him like a tart..."

This was the proper behaviour for the young, whether boys or girls.

Then, in the *Birds*, we read:

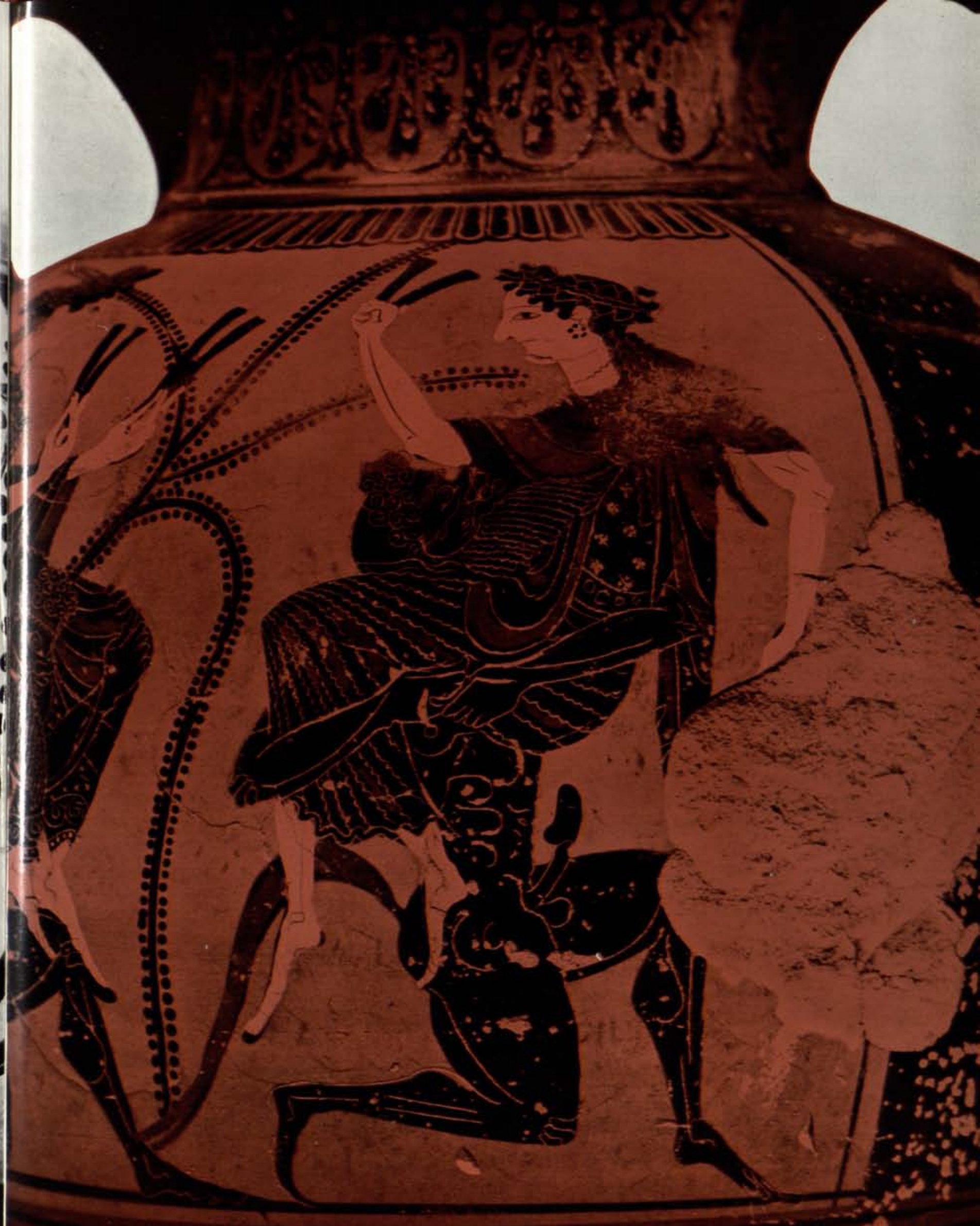
"I'd like to know a town where the father of a handsome lad would come up to me and reproach me as follows: 'You're a fine one, you meet my son coming out of the gymnasium, all bathed, you don't kiss him, you don't say a word to him, you don't embrace or tickle him, and you call yourself a friend of the family...'"

Here we are dealing with something else: a frank enthusiasm for youth expressed in the lighthearted tones of comedy and perhaps less perverted than it may seem to us today.















For the Greeks the feelings and passions of love could be just as noble when inspired by male beauty as they were when aroused by women. Many of them considered that the physical beauty of a youth between twelve and eighteen years old was purer and more harmonious, more admirably proportioned and genuine, than the self-conscious, disturbing grace of the female body. The athletic ideal of the *paideia* from which women were excluded and the humanist ambition to achieve a simultaneous blossoming of body, mind and soul played a part in this belief. This is borne out by the plea of Callicratidas, the homosexual, in Lucian's *Dialogue of Love*. After deprecating the coquetry and artifice, futility and weakness of women, he describes "the innocent ways of a young boy":

"At daybreak he rises from his bed which he shares with no-one; a bath of clear water washes the sleep from his eyes. . . . Soon he leaves his home, keeping his eyes modestly lowered. . . . His servants and tutors accompany him. They do not carry a comb for his hair, not a looking-glass to show him his likeness. . . . but a number of tablets or books, precious repositories of the ancient virtues, or his lyre, if he is going to his music lesson. After diligent study of the sciences, he develops his body by noble exercises. He tames the chargers of Thessaly and, practising the arts of war in time of peace, he throws the javelin and perfects his skill in archery. Then you can see him at the gymnasium, his body exposed to the heat of the sun, covering himself with sand and hardening himself for his labours. Weariness makes the sweat trickle down his limbs; he plunges briefly into a bath, sits down to a frugal meal, and shortly afterwards returns to his exertions. . . ."

"Who would not love a boy like that? Who would be so blind in body and soul? How could anyone help loving him? In the gymnasium he is Hermes, he is Apollo touching the lyre, he is Castor taming the chargers. Inhabiting a mortal body, he follows in the footsteps of the gods."

The idea of the virtues of comradeship, as fostered by an ancient warrior caste and kept up in the friendships of the gymnasium and the *ephebeum*, and the spirit of emulation, courage and devotion arising from the desire to be admired by a loved one were for many sufficient recommendation for *paederasty*. The carnal act was important not so much for the pleasure it gave as for the bond it created. In fact, the custom of the Spartans, the Cretans, and the Boeotians of pairing men with boys when they reached the age of twelve—especially when we remember the similar customs pertaining to girls (in Sparta, the law permitted the enjoyment of unmarried girls, as of boys)—would seem to have been in the



nature of an initiation rite. Yet as soon as Eros intervenes, how can sensuality be avoided without offending Aphrodite? And can the sensual pleasure of love between men compare with that of love between men and women?

The counter-plea of Charicles, the advocate of heterosexual love, is that the pleasures that satisfy best are the more lasting ones:

"A woman, from puberty to middle age and until the wrinkles cover up her charms, is a worthy object of man's embraces and tender feelings; even when her beauty has passed, her experience tells in her favour. The pursuit of a young man of twenty is, in my opinion, an ignoble and perverse indulgence. His limbs are the limbs of a man, strong and sinewy; his once delicate chin is roughened by a beard and his rounded thighs are covered with hair—I leave the more private parts to those with experience in such matters. A woman, however, brilliantly combines all that is graceful with the most seductive colouring..."

Why not seek a pleasure that is mutual? "Intercourse with women procures the reciprocal pleasure of shared enjoyment; each partner brings the other to the extremes of bliss and both end up equally satisfied... This cannot happen with boys. The paederast thinks he is savouring a perfect pleasure; but the outraged object of his lust experiences only pain and tears; and even when in time he may not feel so much, you still bring him only discomfort and not a grain of pleasure. If I may be permitted to say so, it is possible to experience great sensual enjoyment by using a woman as the paederasts use their minions, and this opens up a doubly pleasurable prospect; but a man can never give the pleasure that it is a woman's sole prerogative to dispense."

Finally, he suggests that paederasty violates a law of nature, whereby heterosexual intercourse has always been the means of maintaining life and preserving the race. "A lion does not love another lion, nor do male bears and boars seek out their own sex, but the love of the female reigns alone in their hearts." Lucian's Callicratidas bases his reply to this fundamental objection on man's superiority to animals, and on the dictates of beauty and reason. "Lions do not love lions because they do not think speculatively; male bears do not seek out their own sex because they do not know the sweets of friendship. But human reason, guided by knowledge and long experience, has chosen what is most beautiful and gives its sanction to the love of boys."















"Beware, Charicles, of condemning as a bad invention something that was not always known, and do not despise our type of love just because heterosexual love has a longer history. You mustn't forget that, while the earliest inventions were born of necessity, what man's genius has since discovered at leisure is of more value in our eyes..."

"There are two opposing kinds of love, and each lights a different flame in our souls. One is like a child, interested only in childish things; it cannot be guided by reason; foolish men are swayed by its violence; it produces the desires that drive them into the arms of women... The other is sincere and serious-minded and everything about it proclaims its healthy origins; it engenders virtuous feelings and its influence gently penetrates our souls; when it favours us, we enjoy sensual pleasure combined with virtue..."

"The need to perpetuate the human race has driven man to marriage, but paederastic love alone exercises its noble sway over the philosopher's heart."

While it cannot be said that Greek philosophy unreservedly condoned paederasty, it was sufficiently rich and varied to encourage speculation on the strange power of Eros, its manifestations, and the aspirations they symbolised or aroused. Every Greek philosopher and school of philosophy raised the question of love and its relationship to the beautiful and the good.

Socrates—that very chaste amorist whose object in pursuing young men was only to stimulate their minds and to teach them happiness through virtue—liked to say that the only science he knew was that of love, and particularly stressed the educational value of love inspired by beauty, provided that it was purely spiritual. Plato, more indulgent to the body, saw in all love the promise of a creative union with beauty in the spiritual sense, an intimation of immortality and, in its highest form, a means of giving back the soul the wings it had lost. Aristotelian ethics, straining after an ideal of moral grandeur, condemned sexual intemperance, but recognized that feelings inspired by legitimate affection were conducive to virtue. Epicurianism with its concern for serenity counselled avoidance of the torments of love, either by foregoing carnal intercourse altogether or by indulging in it simply to assuage desire. But stoicism brought back the Platonic theme of the connexion between physical and moral beauty, between love inspired by beauty and friendship as a force for good.



We cannot go into the details of these philosophic systems here. But a broad idea of Greek thought on love may perhaps be gained from Diotima's words on the subject as reported by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*.

According to Diotima, love is not really a god, but a "great demon, half god and half mortal." He is the son of Expediency and Poverty and "his delicacy is far from equalling his beauty" since he has much of his mother's nature. He also takes after his father and is "perpetually on the look-out for all that is beautiful and good; he forges ahead, strains every nerve, is virile, an outstanding hunter, inventive and resourceful, and spends his whole life in speculation" like those who are mid-way between ignorance and knowledge. "Love seeks beauty as its object" and strives to possess it. But the possession of beautiful things is only a means to an end, just as the love of good things is a means of obtaining happiness. In what way, then, is beauty an object of love? "The object of love," says Diotima, "is a creative union with beauty on both the spiritual and physical levels."

In the physical sense, "union between man and woman is a creative act and has something divine about it"; for procreation enables mortals to partake of immortality, this being the ultimate object of love—i.e., perpetuation of what is good. "Those whose fertility is physical will be attracted primarily to women; for them, love will be an attempt to secure personal immortality, lasting fame, and happiness for all eternity by begetting children." But there are others whose fertility is essentially spiritual: "for there are some whose souls are more fertile than their bodies in those spheres in which the soul can be creative". The favoured being who possesses this spiritual fertility will, from childhood, "search for beauty everywhere, for he will be able to create only with beauty, never with ugliness. He will feel more tender towards a beautiful body than towards an ugly one. And if it contains a fine, noble, and high-born soul, his tenderness will reach a peak; he will forthwith be inspired to discuss worthy thoughts and right behaviour, and to undertake the education of the loved one. It seems that in the latter's presence his soul brings forth all that it has long been harbouring... what he thus creates is nurtured by him and his partner, and the bond between them is infinitely closer and more genuinely affectionate than that between parent and child because their union has borne such beautiful and indestructible fruit."

The initiation into the secret of love proceeds by degrees. To start with physical beauty, to love a single beautiful body first, then to become aware that the beauty of one body is akin to the beauty of another,



















to realize that the beauty that dwells in all bodies is one and the same, to learn to hold the beauty of the soul in greater esteem than the beauty of the body, and then to advance with one's guide to an even higher understanding—these, according to Diotima, are the steps towards an awareness of the very essence of beauty: the ideal of the beautiful. “Thus love, most sensitive, deepest and most disturbing of emotions, disciplined by philosophy, intellectualized and universalized . . . may ultimately lead us to a true understanding.”

Such sublime considerations are not lightly to be set aside.



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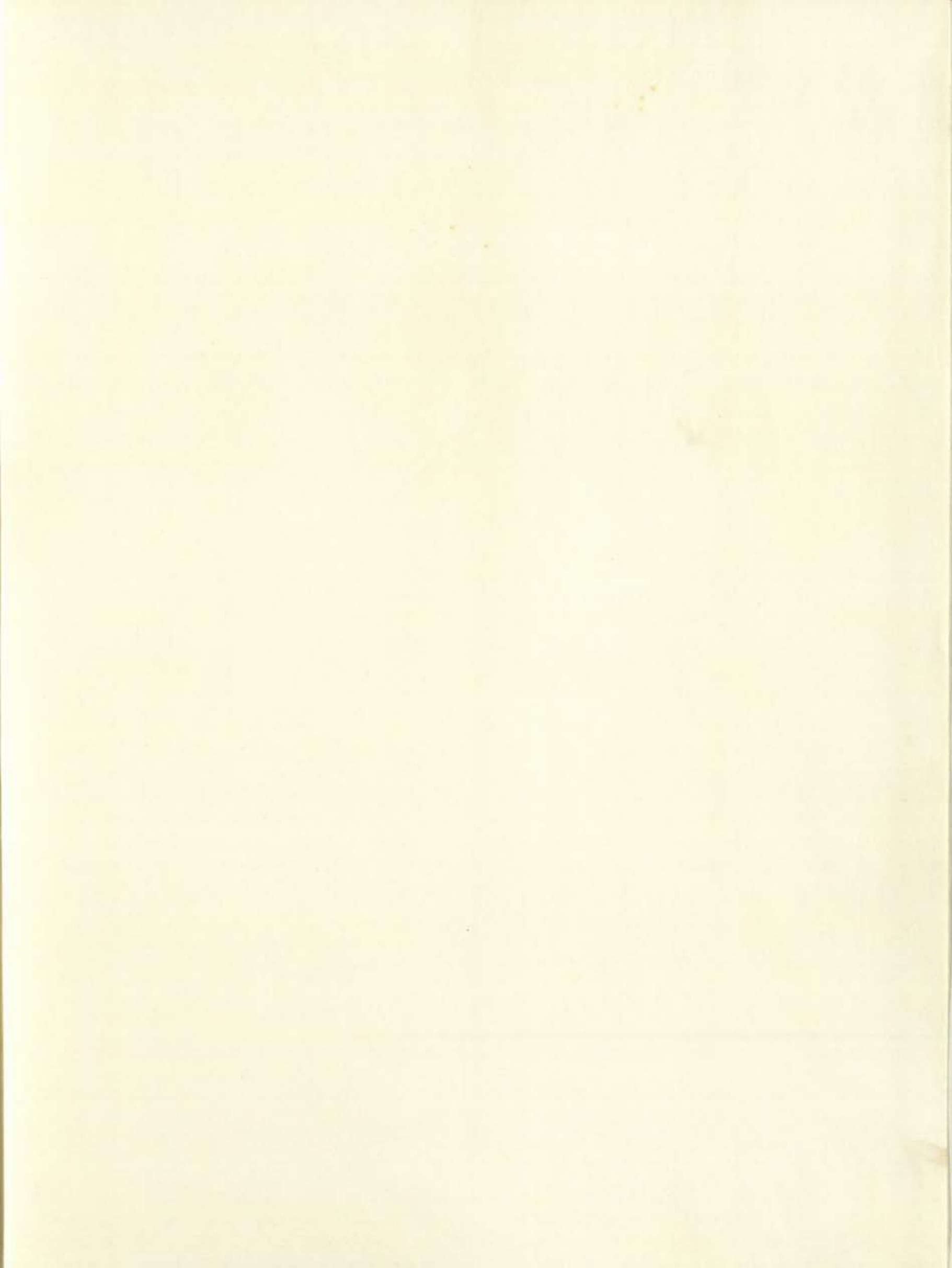
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