

# SUMMARY

THE “PYXIS OF MOUSAIOS” FROM KYNOSARGES  
A NEW WORK BY THE ERETRIA PAINTER

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In this short monograph an important addition to the corpus of Attic pottery is published and studied: a type A red-figure pyxis with the depiction of the nine Muses and the bard Mousaios. All ten figures are identified by inscriptions.

## Findspot

The pyxis was mended from 48 fragments, collected from an offering trench of 430–420 B.C. in the building plot of 10 Diamantopoulou street, Athens. Here, part of the Kynosarges cemetery was excavated in 2001–2002, ca. 320 m due south of the southwest corner of the temple of Olympian Zeus. The site, which is next to the Ilisos river, had been first explored in 1896–1897 by the British School at Athens. From the 1960s to the present, a large number of excavations of the Greek Archaeological Service prior to construction of modern buildings, have brought to light extensive remains of Geometric to Late Roman cemeteries, plus a large edifice first explored in the old excavations as well; it is usually identified with the “...gymnasium named after Hadrian” mentioned by Pausanias (1.18.9).

## Shape

The vase is a new specimen of the elaborate type A red-figure pyxides of the late 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Two of these products of the Eretria Painter (Appendix, Catalogue of Vases, 32, 39) have been described by Sally Roberts as “different trial pieces from a period of chaotic experimentation”.

The “Pyxis of Mousaios” has a cylindrical, imperceptibly incurving box, particularly tall for its diameter. The projecting lower keel is articulated to the body through a step. The tripartite ring foot has an angled profile and two grooves at the rim, around the resting surface. Two light rings are placed at the junction of box and foot, internally and externally. The lid is domed (copying the lids of type C pyxides), its brim separated by a ridge, and with a groove at its outer edge. It is topped by a partially preserved knob in the shape of an acorn. Its cupule is studded with added gilded plastic dots, its hollow shaft is cylindrical, its stem is swelling towards its bottom. A small non-joining

cylindroconical sherd may belong to the lost top of the knob. The acorn-shaped knob supports the view that the acorn lekythoi that appeared shortly afterwards originated in the Eretria Painter's workshop.

## Figural and linear decoration

Of the lid a quarter is preserved. Eros, ball in the raised right hand, is pursuing a fleeing young woman who turns her head. She wears a belted Attic peplos, a necklace and a bracelet. On the ground between them there is a boulder, rendered by added clay, and an L-shaped stick. On the brim, leaf and dart (on both sides, inverted on the underside). In the center, around the moulding of the knob's base, egg and dot. Black underside and knob (apart from its cupule).

The scene on the box consists of three groups of figures.

Group a: Mousaios, seated to the right on a rock (not shown), bearded, plays a Thracian kithara. He wears a chitoniskos, himation, a zeira-chlamys and boots. On his head, a gilded laurel wreath. Behind him, a laurel bush with berries and Polymnia (chiton and himation), holding pipes in the left hand and pointing to Mousaios with the right one. Her hair is tied in a bun. In front of him stands Melpomene, holding a barbitos. She wears a belted chiton and a small himation. Her hair is tied in a bun, wound by a fillet and covered by a headband. Trepsichore (no instrument) leans against her back. She wears a belted Attic peplos. Her hair is covered by a sakkos.

Group b: Kalliopa, seated to the left on a diphros, her feet on a footstool. She wears a chiton and a himation, with the right breast exposed. Her hair is tied in a bun, with a headband and fillets. The diphros is depicted with three feet and part of its underside visible. Its side panel is decorated with the silhouettes of two quadrupeds confronting each other. The footstool is shown in three-quarter view. In front of Kalliopa is the youthful figure of Orania, facing her. She wears a belted Attic peplos with overfold and shoulder cords, her hair tied in a ponytail with a fillet. She holds a chelys-lyra in the left hand. Behind Kalliopa is Thalea with her right hand on Kalliopa's shoulder, the left one holding a cradle kithara (phorminx). She wears a Doric-type peplos open on the right side and a headband with fillets as Melpomene's.

Group c: Euterpa sits to the right on a klismos, which is again drawn with three visible feet. She looks down at a small bird perched on her finger. She wears a chiton and a himation, her hair knotted in a bun, wound with a fillet and covered by a diadem. In front of her are Kleona and Eraton, the latter's right hand on the former's shoulder. Kleona holds a chelys-lyra with the lowered left hand. She wears a chiton and a himation, her hair and diadem similar to Euterpa's. Eraton wears a chiton and a small himation wound around the waist. On her head rests a gilded stephane. Her hair falls back in a long lock partially covered by a small sakkos.

The Muses wear necklaces of two types (six to seven beads or single central pendant). These necklaces are rendered by dots of added and gilded clay. They also wear earrings in the form of a single gilded dot of added clay (best preserved is Melpo-

mene's) as well as double bracelets similarly from gilded added clay (best preserved are Thaleia's and the one on Kalliopa's left hand).

Above the scene egg and dot, beneath it maeanders in groups of three (once four, under Mousaios) alternating with chequer squares. Leaf and dart on the lower keel, upperside only. Black interior and underside of body, interior and exterior of foot. Side of foot and resting surface reserved.

The stylistic affinities to the middle phase of the work of the Eretria Painter of the high-classical Parthenonean spirit point to a dating in the first half or middle of the decade 430–420 B.C.

## Musical instruments

Mousaios plucks with a plektron in his right hand a seven-stringed Thracian kithara with twisted arms and painted eyes. The latter is a novel feature for this instrument, appearing normally in the phorminges. Above the eyes there is a row of dots of added clay. He supports it on his chest by his left hand through a wrist sling. With the fingers of this hand he touches the strings, perhaps damping them. A tassel of the wrist sling hangs down.

Thalea holds an eight-stringed cradle kithara (phorminx) with eyes and two gilded dots of added clay. Only her left hand is depicted on the strings, in the same manner as Mousaios's.

Melpomene holds in her left hand a five-stringed barbitos, and in her right hand a plektron attached to one of the arms of the barbitos with a cord.

Kleona and Ourania each hold a seven-stringed chelys-lyra. Kleona's lyra has the back side visible, Ourania's the front one. Ourania's left hand is on the strings, in the same stance as Mousaios's and Thaleia's left hands.

Polymnia holds double pipes in front of her chest.

## Inscriptions

The added white colour of the ten inscriptions painted horizontally above the heads of the figures (with a single exception), has mostly worn off. Polymnia's is the only vertical one for lack of space. Transcription: *Πολύμνια, Μο[υ]σα[ι]ο[ς], Με(λ)πομένη, Τρεψιχόρη, Ὀρανία, Καλλιόπα, Θάλεα, Εὐτέρπα, Κλεώνα, Ἐρατών*. Not all inscriptions are neat; in some cases, the letter bars have been overpainted to correct an error and occasionally some paint has dripped. Some non-standard forms occur: Eraton for Erato, Kleona for Kleio, Trepsichore/a (uncertain last letter) for Terpsichore. Alphabet is mixed Attic-Ionic, name forms Doric except for Melpomene, which was written by mistake without the -l-. Mousaios was written with the diphthong -ou-, not "Mosaios" as usually.

## Interpretation

If the inscriptions did not exist, the scene would have been interpreted as the musical contest between Thamyris and the Muses (Appendix, Catalogue of Vases, 2–9, 11, 12). “Thamyris” is playing his kithara, while the Muses look on with discontent, awaiting their turn. Surprisingly, a Mousaios was identified, who is normally shown as a young man or ephebe (except for 46). Mousaios, even though referred to as a Thracian as well, was a figure of particularly Athenian identity, connected to the Eleusinian Mysteries. The full group of the nine Muses with their Hesiodic names is a rare early occurrence in imagery. It is possible that originally the bearded bard was painted as Thamyris. Perhaps at some advanced stage of the manufacture process he was inscribed “Mousaios” as an afterthought to Athenize the scene, regardless of the conceptual contradiction that arose.