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The Statuary Group "Europe on The Bull" by Pythagoras of Rhegion

This paper is concerned with the philological analysis of the sculptural group of "Europa on the Bull", made by Pythagoras of Rhegion around the first half of the 5th century B.C. for the powerful polis of Taras, it is known among ancient sources to be the first large-scale statuary version of the myth of the Phoenician princess[1]. Much has been debated since the first half of the 19th century about this "ghost" sculptor, as the fragmentary and contradictory information gleaned from ancient authors, along with the discordant data obtained by modern scholars, still leave open the question concerning the master who became the most celebrated artist of the Greek West [9, p. 593].

To best develop the *status quaestionis*, we will critically analyze all testimonies collected in the monumental work by German scholar Johannes Overbeck, published in 1868 and titled "*Die antiken Schriftquellen zur Geschichte der bildenden Künste bei den Griechen*" and its 2014 reissue, titled simply *"Der neue Overbeck,"* which makes this book even more valuable [9][2].

The sources collected by Overbeck on "Europe on the Bull," used for our work, are respectively the fourth book of Cicero's "*In Verrem actio secundae*", the fifth book of Varro's "*De lingua Latina*", and the thirty-eighth book of Tatian the Syrian's "*Oratio ad Graecos*".

In the fourth book of the *Actio secundae* of the *Verrinae*, Marcus Tullius Cicero deals with the thefts and looting of artistic works. These events were perpetrated in Sicily during the tenure of Gaius Licinius Verres as praetor (73–70 B.C.); many of these were statues, hence the book is also known as *De signis* ("About Statues"). Cicero cites "Europa on the Bull" as one of several examples to highlight the importance these sculptures had for the political, religious, and social institutions of the main *poleis* of Sicily and Magna Graecia, emphasizing the identity value attached to their monuments[3]. Analyzing the Ciceronian source, the information we are able to obtain about the group is essentially related to its topographical location in the city of Taras, near the sanctuary of the goddess Hestia[4]. Moreover, not a minor issue, Cicero does not mention Pythagoras as the author of the group — suggesting an in-depth knowledge

[1] The main monographic papers on Pythagoras are by H. Brunn [3]; H. Lechat [12]; O. Waldhauer [24]; M. Bieber [2]; Ch. Hofkes-Brukker [10]; S. Lagona [11]]; De Franciscis [8]; S. Stucchi [21]; S. Pafumi [17]; the article in "Der neue Overbeck" by K. Hallof, S. Kansteiner and L. Lehmann [9]; A. Arcudi [1].

[2] This edition goes far beyond being a simple revision or addition of new sources (such as may be, for example, the "Epicurean Vatican Gnomology" or the epigrams of the Hellenistic poet Posidippus of Pella) and takes into account the research initiated by Overbeck in order to meet the new needs of scholars, enriching the work with the latest knowledge in the fields of epigraphy, philology and archaeology of the classical world.

[3] "quid arbitramini ... merere velle ... Tarentinos ut Europa in tauro amittant?" (What do you think the Tarantines would pay not to lose Europa on bull?). In Verrem 2.4.135 (DNO 752).

[4] "... in aede Vestae est" (in the temple of Vesta). In Verrem 2.4.135.

Fig. 1. The Gortys group of Europa on the Bull. London, British Museum, no. 1862,0201.1 (British Museum Sculpture no. 1535). Creative Commons © The Trustees of the British Museum

Fig. 2. The bronze rear part of a bull from the Capitoline Museums, no. 1067. Creative Commons / Wikimedia. Photo by Sailko

of the sculpture, used as only one of many pieces of evidence to strengthen his accusatory harangue against Gaius Licinius Verres[5].

As for the account given by Marcus Terentius Varro in his *"De lingua Latina"*, the Roman scholar, starting with an etymological analysis of the origin of the word "Europa," quickly mentions the myth of the Phoenician princess, citing the version of the grammarian Manlius (coeval with his teacher Lucius Aelius Stilonus Preconinus). The merit of the Varronian source lies in its concise but comprehensive knowledge of the bronze group of Pythagoras. In fact, although indirect evidence remains (such as that of Cicero), from Varro we know not only the name of the author and the location of the sculpture, but also the material from which the statue was made[6].

Finally, we have the source of the palaeochristian writer Tatian the Syrian, who in his opus *"Oratio ad Graecos"* initiates a discourse against all classical civilization, expressing his con-

[5] In the appeal trial against Verres, Cicero had already achieved his goal with the first act: in just two hearings, pressed by interrogatories, testimony and documented sources, Verres was found guilty and voluntarily went into exile. The second act was published after the trial in five books, reworking the prosecution's arguments in a narrative way. In the first books, Cicero reenacts the misappropriations of works of art to achieve maximum persuasive effect and dismantle the defense's arguments. In the final chapters, however, the art theme takes on an emotional and religious emphasis, emphasizing the Romans' relationship with Greek art.

[6] "Europa ab Europa Agenoris, quam ex Phoenice Manlius scribit taurum exportasse, quorum egregiam imaginem ex aere Pythagoras Tarenti." (Europa owes its name to Europa daughter of Agenor, who was carried off by a bull from Phoenicia, as Manlius wrote; of this Pythagoras created an excellent bronze group at Tarentum). De lingua Latina 5.32.

Fig. 3. Fragment of a female torso from Taranto. 4th century B.C. Terracotta. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Taranto, no. 1600119557. Beni Culturali Standard (BCS) / Creative Commons https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/ArchaeologicalProperty/1600119557

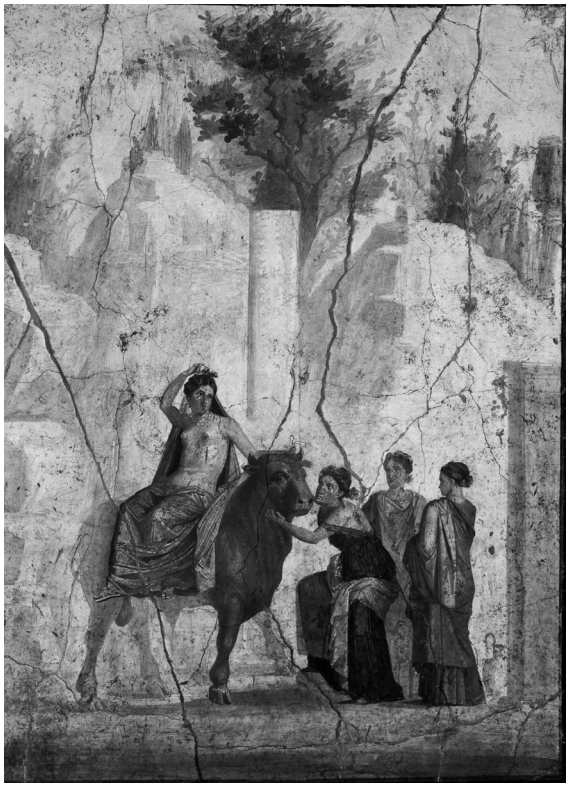

Fig. 4. Wall painting of Europa and the Bull, Pompeii (IX 5 18-21). Naples, National Archaeological Museum, no. 111475. Public Domain / Wikimedia. Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen

tempt for Greek culture[7]. In particular, in the so-called "catalog of artists"[8], a list of 37 statues visible in Antonine-era Rome where it was possible to read the perverted morals of the pagans, the apologist clearly mentions two works by this artist: "Europa on the Bull" and the group of fratricides "Eteocles and Polynices"[9]. These sculptures were placed in a topographical context

[7] "ἐγὼ καὶ Πυθαγόρου κατέγνωκα τὴν Εὐρώπην ἐπὶ τοῦ ταύρου καθιδρύσαντος καὶ ὑμῶν, οἵτινες τοῦ Διὸς τὸν κατήγορον διὰ τὴν ἐκείνου τέχνην τετιμήκατε". (I also condemn Pythagoras, who made Europa sit on the bull, who, like you, honors the ungodly Zeus with his art), Oratio ad Graecos 33.8.

[8] Oratio ad Graecos 33–34. For a comprehensive analysis of the so-called "catalog of artists," we refer to E. Caliri's article [4].

[9] "πῶς γὰροὺ χαλεπὸν ἀδελφοκτονίαν παρ' ὑμῖν τετιμῆσθαι, οἳ Πολυνείκους καἰΕτεοκλέους ὁρῶντες τὰ σχήματα [καὶ] μὴ σὺντῷ ποιήσαντι Πυθαγόρᾳ καταβοθρώσαντες συναπόλλυτε τῆς κακίας τὰὑπο μνήματα" (How then can it be borne with serenity that even fratricide is held in honor with you, since at the sight of the statues of Polynices and Eteocles you do not throw them together with their master Pythagoras into a pit and destroy these symbols of wickedness?) Oratio ad Graecos 34.1. Regarding the possible identification of the statues of Eteocles and Polynices, please refer to [5; 7].

that can be framed with the area of the Campus Martius where the theater of Pompey the Great stood, a place that the apologist knew well since he claimed to have attended many theatrical performances during his Roman sojourn (Oratio ad Graecos 22). Although Tatian's list cannot be used to automatically reconstruct the original decorative program of the *Monumenta Pompeiana*, his text is not merely a polemical rhetorical exercise; in fact, it is the fruit of direct evidence of statues from the Greek world (Oratio ad Graecos 35).

Fig. 5. Silver denarius serratus of Lucius Volteius Strabo, mint of Rome, 81 B.C. © Heritage Auctions/ Numismatica Ars Classica, Auction 138, Lot 445 https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces66857.html

If we cross-reference the sources, we clearly read that Pythagoras's opus still enjoyed some fame between the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD, although the genesis of the group can generally be traced to the first half of the 5th century BC. Moreover, from the Ciceronian Verrines we know that until 70 BC "Europe on the Bull" was still in Taras and was certainly not involved in the two sackings reported by Strabo (6.3.1), first that by the Carthaginians during the years of the Second Punic War (212 BC) and that made by the Romans after their conquest of the city in 209 BC, where Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus (known as the cunctator) opposed the looting of the statues, leaving the Tarantines with "their irritated gods," as reported by Livy[10]. Further corroboration comes from the passage of Varro, whose *"De lingua Latina"* (composed between 47–44 BC) not only confirms the presence of the statue in the polis still at the head of the Italiote League during the first half of the 1st century BC, but thus also places an important *terminus post quem* on how and when it was stolen by the Romans. In this sense, Tatian's work, while not providing secure data on the original location of the group due to the frequent restorations to the Campus Martius over time[11], remains an important testimony on the presence of the Pythagorean group in Imperial Rome [15], allowing us to establish a *terminus ante quem*. Therefore, we can advance the hypothesis that this removal occurred in a time span between the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, when the city of Rome was the subject of impressive public works that changed the face of the *Urbe*, with countless works of art from Greece and the Greek West.

If the ancient sources give us a partial picture of the information that can be obtained about the sculpture, the information that can be obtained from the archaeological data is extremely deficient. In fact, although the myth of Europa had a remarkable and long-lived diffusion in the field of figurative arts in the ancient world (as can be inferred from the numerous testimonies in the field of vase painting, as well as in temple architecture and votive statuary of medium-small size), in full-round sculpture of important sizes, the examples are restricted to

[10] "deos iratos Tarentinis relinqui iussit", Livius, Ab urbe condita XXVII.16.

[11] A "Porticus Europae" is mentioned in the area by Martial (Epigram, 2.14), but without providing further topographical information.

only two cases: the **Gortys** group preserved in London in the British Museum and the bronze rear part of a bull preserved in Rome in the Capitoline Museums.

Of the marble group from Gortys (Fig. 1), the locality where, by mythical tradition, the union between Zeus and Europa took place, there has been much debate as to whether or not it replicates the Tarentine group of Pythagoras of Rhegion, as the work shows a careful execution of all those details that made the Magna Graecian sculptor famous. The great care with which the hairy masses, muscle bundles, and veins of the bull are rendered, coupled with the rendering of the drapery of the himation, which covers the torso of the figure of Europa, have led many scholars to speculate that the group is a copy of the bronze original made by the Rhegion master around the first quarter of the 5th century B.C. However, according to Romeo's analysis, the thesis seems to rest on shaky foundations since the clothing of the princess is stylistically inspired by models from a mature phase of the classical age. Thus, the Gortys group could likely be a Roman copy made by a local workshop from an original of the mid-5th-century B.C. [19].

Of definite interest are the remains of a bronze bull of considerable size that can be seen in the Hall of Bronzes in the Capitoline Museums in Rome (Fig. 2). The components of the statue pertain to the left flank of the lumbar portion of the body, the corresponding hind quarter and the tail, were found in 1849 in an underground room of Vicolo delle Palme (today Vicolo dell'Atleta) in Trastevere. The area of discovery, according to the hypotheses brought forward by a contribution signed by four hands by Parisi Presicce and Touchette [18], was a 2nd-century A.D. bath complex transformed in late antique or medieval times into a foundry. Thus, the large fragments of the bull (whose surveyed measurements range from a height of 1.87 m to a length of 1.52 m) were intended for casting like numerous other bronze statues, if fortuitous circumstances had not prevented it. The remains subjected to restoration operations and archaeometric analysis have established that the work is a 5th-century B.C. Greek original made using the "lost wax" technique. Specifically, these are the result of a single bronze casting characterized by the extreme thinness of the walls and the presence of small bronze dowels, used to cover surface imperfections due to the cooling of the alloy. The tail cast separately and soldered in a second restoration appears to have been repositioned after a breakage event, while the remnant of a small portion of the right side, reassembled by casting a piece with a thinner diameter than the rest of the statue, was to cover a missing part. In addition, the presence of other bronze tesserae of polygonal shape superimposed on part of the rectangular ones (related to those of the Classical and Hellenistic ages) may refer to restorations of the Roman age and highlight the importance the statue had at the time. Finally, again in the modern restoration stages, welding channels were distinguished from the left paw that were later filled in with molten lead. This action, which can be explained as a phase of reassembling the statue in a different location from the original one, would allow the suggestion of the hypothesis that the bull may have been the fruit of war booty from Greece or Magna Graecia and transported to Rome at a date difficult to indicate since "there is no evidence of its transfer" [18, p. 81].

With regard to the possibility of identifying the work, Parisi Presicce wanted to recognize in the remains of this sculpture "Europa on the bull" by Pythagoras of Rhegion since the presence of the small welded area on the right side of the bull led the scholar to hypothesize that a figure was originally seated on the animal. The thesis advanced by Parisi Presicce is supported by both archaeometric data and some stylistic features related to the anatomical rendering of the fragments of the bull, but the lack of any element related to the presence of Europa does not com-

pletely rule out the other theories advanced about the sculpture. In fact, Lori-Ann Touchette interprets the bull as a sacred statue exhibited in a temple on the Forum. She suggests that the restoration work on the animal's flank would be nothing more than the sign of the removal of the *dorsuale*, a wide band of cloth that was placed on the back of the beast led to sacrifice [18, p. 82]. In spite of this, the bronze from the Capitoline Museums remains the most credible archaeological find regarding its identification with Pythagoras' "Europa on the Bull" group, and until proven otherwise, it is appropriate to continue looking for other elements that can enrich the debate, as exemplified in a recent contribution by Daniele Castrizio [6].

Despite the large amount of existing evidence on the mythological theme, the fact that there is no description of Pythagoras' sculpture by ancient authors greatly complicates the possibility of finding an iconographic comparison. Therefore, there is little room for scholarly research to compose a figurative scheme of the sculptural group, especially regarding the appearance of Europa. From the archaeological evidence, she is depicted either dressed in himation or slightly undressed with her breasts exposed. Another variant that characterizes the figure of the Phoenician princess is the presence or absence of the *velificatio*, the veil that announces the hierogamy between the heroine and Zeus. Although Pythagoras was famous for essentially reproducing heroic nudes, we know that at least one of his works was draped. In fact, from an account reported by both Pliny the Elder (N.H. 34.59) and Athenaeus (Deipn. I, 19 b, c), we learn of an anecdote concerning the bronze statue of the musician Cleon of Thebes: a person, before fleeing the city conquered by Alexander the Great, hid a hoard of coins in the hollow of the sculpture's himation. Returning after 30 years, the man found the little treasure, and from then on the statue of the musician was nicknamed "*Dicaeus*" (the righteous). This episode demonstrates that we should not rule out the possibility of a draped and fully dressed Europa, as depicted in most archaic iconographic schemes, just as we cannot totally reject the possibility that the bronze artist from Rhegion represented the maiden nude or partially dressed, as she probably seems to have been made.

In this sense, of considerable interest is the discourse initiated by several scholars on the possibility of finding useful correspondences to restore a compositional scheme of the group thanks to the reproduction work of local workshops of high craftsmanship in Southern Italy. In this regard, an architectural terracotta found precisely in Tarentum, of which we have a fragment of a female torso completely uncovered up to the hips wrapped in a cloak gathered in a few folds, has attracted some attention (Fig. 3). The identification with the figure of Europa riding the bull and its derivation from the Pythagorean group has been proposed by George Vallet, who sees in the torsion of the torso a dynamic rhythm in contrast to the direction of the bull's run. Such a scheme, according to Vallet, which presents Europa in perspective with her arm raised in the act of supporting the swaying veil above her head, is new when compared to the traditional typology of late 6th- and early 5th-century BC iconography. In fact, prior to the first half of the 5th century BC Europa was represented generically with her body in perspective and head in profile, clinging with both hands to the back of the running bull [23]. Alfonso De Franciscis, who considers Vallet's proposal to lie chronologically too distant to be an iconographic derivation of the Tarentine sculptural group, finds a viable alternative in another terracotta from Rosarno that chronologically seems to be closer to Pythagoras' oeuvre and which presents that search for movement that is a peculiar characteristic of the sculptor's art [8, p. 60–61]. Instead, Sebastiana Lagona, endorsing what Vallet has said, broadens the discussion by finding echoes of the Tarentine

clay model in a mirror found in Locri, datable to around 450 BC For Lagona, the rarity of this figurative composition in this period may suggest a prototype whose persistence could also be indicated by some works from the Roman period, in which the same iconographic pattern returns. In this regard reference is made to a Pompeian painting in which the exact reproduction of the prototype from which the Tarentine terracotta derives can be observed (Fig. 4), as well as to a series of coins minted by Volumnius in the 1st century BC (Fig. 5), in which the group appears in a similar manner but with the variant of Europa turning her gaze behind her [11].

The myth of Europa is very ancient, certainly predating the 8th century BC, since we find it mentioned in the Iliad (14.321–322). Agenor, one of the twins whom Libya had generated with Poseidon (the other was Belus of Egypt), left Egypt and settled in Sidon where he married Telephassa, (she who lights afar), elsewhere also called Argiope (white-faced) who bore him Cadmus, Phoenix, and Kilix as sons and Europa as his only daughter. Zeus fell in love with the princess and ordered Hermes to drive Agenor's cattle to the coast of the Sea of Tyre, the place where Europa and her handmaidens usually spent leisure time. The deity, in the guise of a white bull, joined the rest of the herd and did not delay in attracting the attention of the maiden, who immediately felt awe and curiosity for such a beautiful and tame animal. Thus, Zeus won the confidence of the princess and mounted her on his mighty taurine back, **f**leeing the shores of Tyre across the sea to the island of Crete, where under the branches of a plane tree near the city of Gortys he joined Europa, no longer in the guise of a bull but in that of an eagle, revealing his divine identity. From this union three sons were born, destined to rule over the island of Crete: Minos, Radamanthus, and Sarpedon.

The literary sources and related iconographic transpositions of the myth bring out a precise connotation of a geographical character of the figure of Europa and are fundamental to understanding the toponymic meanings that will be attributed first to the Aegean area alone and later, with the phenomenon of colonization, to the territories occupied by the Greeks in the West. In this sense, the rape of the Phoenician princess takes on very important geo-political and cultural values for the communities of the *poleis* of southern Italy and Sicily, becoming to all intents and purposes a metaphor for the Transmarine migrations that occurred at the dawn of the 8th century BC [18].

In this context, the myth of Europa arrives in *Iapigia* and particularly in the Ionian arc (Gulf of Taranto), where the city of Taras would be founded at the end of the 8th century BC. From the first quarter of the 6th century BC, Taras would be involved in continuous clashes with the indigenous peoples of the Peuceti and Messapi for control of the surrounding territories and for the defense of the *polis*' boundaries. With the latter, the Tarentines would achieve two victories between 480 BC and 470 BC, celebrated at Delphi with two splendid votives. The first one made by Hageladas of Argos depicted bronze figures of four women and sixteen horses, prey to war. The second one created by the Aeginetians Onatas and Kalynthos depicted the eponymous hero Taras, the leader of the Parthenian colonial expedition, and the dolphin, looming over the Iapygian king Opis who had fallen in battle (Paus. X, 10, 6; 13, 10.). But the fortunes of the conflict were reversed, leading to what was called by Herodotus "the bloodiest of all the defeats suffered by the Greeks" (7.170)[12]. This involved not only the Tarentines but also their allies from Rhegion, led by Mycitos. It is still much debated whether this event took place after the two Tarentine victories or between them; it certainly caused the

[12] VII, 170.

change of political regime in the two cities, as also reported by Diodorus Siculus (11.52), in a chronological span between 473 BC and 467 BC.

It is within this complex scenario that the work of the master from Rhegion should be included, which, as has already been mentioned by Cicero, assumed inestimable value for the Greek identity of the city of Tarentum. In fact, the Italiote polis stands in the geopolitical chessboard of the Ionian arc as the most extreme border bulwark of the Greek West, and the sculptural group of the bronze artist from Rhegion sums up its political manifesto in its mythographic theme. The sculpture was included in the decorative context of the acropolis (identifiable with the present area of the old city of Tarentum), placed probably within the *temenos* of the sanctuary of the goddess Hestia, one of the most sacred and important monuments of the *agora* [14; 22]. The group may have been made at a date between the defeat inflicted on the Tarantines and the Regginians (473 B.C.) and the overthrow of their oligarchic systems (467 B.C.) which in Taras brought a democratic form of regime, and in Rhegion the ousting of the tyrant-regent Mycitos[13]. The latter event may have resulted in Pythagoras deciding to leave Italy and relocate to the Peloponnese, thus launching his successful career as a sculptor for the most important athletes of the Panhellenic games. This resulted in securing his legacy as one of the most significant masters of Greek art, on a par with the likes of Myron, Phidias, and Polyclitus.

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[13] For a complete and exhaustive reseeding of the conflicts between Iapygian and Tarantinian peoples, we refer to [16; 20].

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Title. The Statuary Group "Europe on the Bull" by Pythagoras of Rhegion

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Abstract. This paper is concerned with the philological analysis of the sculptural group of "Europa on the Bull", made by Pythagoras of Rhegion for the powerful polis of Taras. In order to develop the topic in the most effective manner, we will analyze in depth the literary testimonies of the ancient authors such as Cicero, Varro, and Tatian the Syrian; while with the most accredited archaeological data, identified by modern studies, we will try shed light on one of the most celebrated works of Western Greek art. In this way, we identify the possible echoes of this sculptural work in the Graeco-Roman world, and try to answer the long-standing question about its probable date of creation, which is, as we have proposed, situated between 473 and 467 BC.

Keywords: ancient Greek sculpture, Europa, Pythagoras of Rhegion, Magna Graecia, Tarentum, Rome, Cicero, Rhegion, Sicily

Название статьи. Статуарная группа «Европа на быке» Пифагора Регийского

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Аннотация. В данной статье предпринят анализ источников, относящихся к скульптурной группе «Европа на быке», созданной Пифагором Регийским для влиятельного апулийского полиса Тарента. Для раскрытия темы подробно рассматриваются свидетельства Цицерона, Варрона, Татиана Сирийского. Кроме того мы постараемся осветить этот прославленный памятник искусства Великой Греции с разных сторон на основе атрибуций, поддерживаемых современными исследователями. Таким образом, мы предприняли попытку ответить на главные вопросы: какое влияние оказало данная скульптурная группа на античное искусство в дальнейшем, и когда именно было создано (наше предложение — период между 473 и 467 гг. до н.э.).

Ключевые слова: скульптура древней Греции, Похищение Европы, Пифагор Регийский, Великая Греция, Тарент, Рим, Цицерон, Регий, Сицилия