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## CUPIDO FULMEN TENENS

*Резюме.* Статья представляет собой подборку материала об античных изображениях, на которых Эрос представлен держащим молнию.

Ключевые слова: Eros holding a thunderbolt, Scopas, Praxiteles, Alcibiades

The aim of this note is to collect the extant evidence concerning an important statue which represented the god of love with a rather unusual attribute: the thunderbolt.

This topic has been understudied<sup>1</sup> and this observation hopefully justifies this short article.

A marble statue of Eros with the thunder is known from Pliny 36. 28:

"Equally there is doubt as to whether the Dying Children of Niobe in the temple of the Sosian Apollo was the work of Scopas or of Praxiteles. Similarly, we cannot tell which of the two carved the Father Janus which was dedicated in its rightful temple by Augustus after being brought here from Egypt; and now a covering of gilt has hidden its secret still more. Equally there is a controversy about the Cupid Holding a Thunderbolt in the Hall of Octavia. Only one thing is stated with conviction, namely that the figure is that of Alcibiades, the most handsome youth of that time" (transl. Loeb) (*Par haesitatio est... Scopas an Praxiteles fecerit (...). Similiter in curia Octaviae quaeritur de Cupidine fulmen tenente; id demum adfirmatur, Alcibiadem esse, principem forma in ea aetate.* Text by Corso, Mugellesi, Rosati).

So, there was a marble statue of Eros holding a thunderbolt which was regarded work of either Scopas or Praxiteles and which in fact represented Alcibiades.

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<sup>1</sup> See my review of the issue in Corso 1988: 107–109.

It is likely that the statue portrayed Alcibiades as the most beautiful among mortals, thus worthy to lend his features to Eros, the most beautiful of the gods.

In fact the case of a statue of Eros whose features are inspired by those of Alcibiades is similar to those of Phryne who gave her features to Praxiteles' gilded bronze statue of Aphrodite set up in Delphi<sup>2</sup> as well as to Praxiteles' bronze statue of the Merry Courtesan.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed Alcibiades was proclaimed the most beautiful of men in a tradition which is handed down by Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 1. 3:

"As regards the beauty of Alcibiades, it is perhaps unnecessary to say aught, except that it flowered out with each successive season of his bodily growth, and made him, alike in boyhood, youth and manhood, lovely and pleasant. The saying of Euripides, that 'beauty's autumn, too, is beautiful', is not always true. But it was certainly the case with Alcibiades, as with few besides, because of his excellent natural parts" (transl. Loeb).

This tradition is echoed also by Athenaeus 12. 534 b – e on the authority of the late Hellenistic biographer Satyrus (= *FHG* iii. 160):

"In his account of the handsome Alcibiades Satyrus says: '(...). Extremely handsome in appearance, he let his hair grow long during a great part of his life, and he wore shoes of a striking pattern, which from him were called Alcibiades. Whenever a choregus he entered the theatre with the procession, robed in purple, he was admired by men and women alike. Hence also Antisthenes, the disciple of Socrates, being one who had seen Alcibiades with his own eyes, affirms that he was strong, manly, cultivated, daring, and beautiful at every period of his life. (...). Returning from Olympia, he dedicated at Athens two tablets painted by Aglaophon; one of

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<sup>2</sup> For the representation of Aphrodite with this statue, see Diogenes Laertius 6. 2. 60. Nevertheless the features of Phryne appeared on the statue: see the several *testimonia* listed by Corso 1997: 123–150, particularly 123, note 1.

<sup>3</sup> See Pliny 34. 71.

these showed figures representing the Olympian and Pythian festivals placing crowns on his head, and on the other was the seated figure of Nemea with Alcibiades on her lap, more beautiful in appearance than the faces of the women' " (transl. Loeb).

The similarity of the cases of Phryne and Alcibiades, both having been of outstanding beauty and both having given their features to images of deities, had been noticed already in antiquity: this comparison is handed down by Clement, *Protrepticus* 4. 47:

"When Phryne the Thespian courtesan was in her flower, the painters used all to imitate her beauty in their pictures of Aphrodite, just as the marble sculptors (*lithoxooi*) copied Alcibiades in their Herms at Athens" (transl. Loeb with amendments).

Thus Clement also testifies to the habit at Athens of marble sculptors to shape gods according to the features of Alcibiades, conceived as the supreme emblem of male beauty.

The late classical statue of Alcibiades as Eros Ceraunophorus probably commemorated the fact that the emblem (*episema*) of Alcibiades' chryselephantine shield was exactly an Eros holding the thunderbolt.

This information is also provided by Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 16. 1–2:

"He (*scil.*: Alcibiades) had a golden shield made for himself, bearing no ancestral device, but an Eros armed with a thunderbolt" (transl. Loeb).

Athenaeus 12. 534 e, who quotes Satyrus, confirms that detail:

"And even when he was a general he wanted to be a dandy still: he carried, for example, a shield made of gold and ivory, on which there was the device of Eros who held through a loop a thunderbolt". (transl. Loeb with an amendment).

The presence of the iconography of Eros with the thunderbolt in the visual culture of the late 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC is

probably confirmed by a gem of that period (fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> Eros is portrayed on the gem standing and frontal. His appearance and style are close to those of Polycleitan athletic youths, particularly to that of the Polycleitan Discophorus.<sup>5</sup> The shape



Fig. 1

of his wings is similar to that of the wings of the Phidian Eros as he is represented in vase painting of this period.<sup>6</sup> The god looks a teenager and not a child. In his right hand he holds the sceptre rather than the spear while in his left outstretched hand he holds the thunderbolt.

The athletic look of the god, his apparent age in his late 10s, finally the conception of this figure in the context of the tradition of Phidias and Polycleitus suggest that this iconography was conceived in the late 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, in the eclectic tradition derived from the two above mentioned masters. Of course the sceptre suggests the ruling power of Eros while the thunderbolt – being the usual attribute of Zeus – is meant to express that Eros, not Zeus, is the most powerful god.

In order to understand the link of this iconography with the Eros *Ceraunophorus* on the shield of Alcibiades<sup>7</sup> it is necessary to remind that Alcibiades took part to the symposium which is described in Plato's *Symposium* and

<sup>4</sup> Ancient clay impression from a convex ring-stone in a private collection: see Boardman 1975: 19, 92, no. 58, who dates the gem to the late 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC, and Hermary 1986: 850–942, particularly 928, no. 945, who dates the gem to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC. I believe Hermary is right: should this Eros be early Hellenistic, he would be a child and would not be conceived as a Polycleitan athlete!

<sup>5</sup> See Kreikenbom 1990: 21–44, 143–156, nos. I. 1–48.

<sup>6</sup> See Cullen Davison 2009: 301, no. 1, and 1345, fig. 9. 3.

<sup>7</sup> On the Eros *Ceraunophorus* on the shield of Alcibiades, see Blanckenhagen 1964: 38–42 and Schneider 1999: 18–44, particularly 32–38. Concerning the visual arts around Alcibiades see Shapiro 2009: 236–263, particularly 246 and 261, note 40. On *episemata* on shields at Athens, see GiUMAN 2000: 31–42.

during which the all-mighty power of Eros was celebrated. Thus the iconography of Eros with sceptre and thunderbolt on the above described classical gem may well depend on the actual *episema* of Alcibiades' shield and should be understood in the context of the conception of Love as the supreme power which characterized the circle of Athenians who are evoked in Plato's *Symposium*.

The loop on the right wrist of the god can be detected on the gem and this detail matches perfectly which Satyrus' report that the god held the thunderbolt through a loop.

Since the iconography of Eros *Ceraunophorus* is unattested before Alcibiades, it is quite possible that he conceived it, in the context of the above mentioned social circle of devotees to Eros.

The fortune of the association of Eros with the thunderbolt in the early 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC is known thanks to another gem: an onyx at Berlin, Muenzkabinett, no. 355, showing Eros holding the thunderbolt in his right hand while his left hand rests on the shoulder of a smaller male figure who carries the sceptre. It was interpreted by Furtwaengler as Eros with his protege Alcibiades.<sup>8</sup> Thus this gem would suggest that Alcibiades' predilection for such an iconography became a well known story already in the decades following his death.

Concerning the statue of Eros-Alcibiades seen by Pliny, of course it was late classical because it was made by either Scopas or Praxiteles. Since the association of Alcibiades with Eros was Platonic and celebrated in the *Symposium*, the idea to patronize this statue may have occurred in the social world of the Academy of Plato.

We can go closer to this creation thanks to the ekphrastic epigram *Anthologia Graeca* 16. 250:

"To Eros.

See how winged Eros is breaking the winged thunderbolt showing that there is a fire stronger than fire".

The configuration of this creation is recognized on a few gems. An excellent example for quality is the cornelian ring-

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<sup>8</sup> See Furtwaengler 1896: 35, no. 355.

stone which is kept at The Hague, The Royal Coin Cabinet, no. 323 (fig. 2).<sup>9</sup> The gem is attributed to the so-called Pellet Style



Fig. 2

which is characteristic of late – republican Rome and dates to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC. The winged nude boy is bent forward with his torso, presses his left knee into the middle of the thunderbolt, which is held with both hands. His hair is tied in a knot in the nape of the neck. Below his right foot there is a ground line which occurs often on Roman gems when an *opus nobile* is copied.<sup>10</sup>

Other, more coarse examples of the same iconography are a ring-stone which also dates to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC, is also kept at The Hague, The Royal Coin Cabinet, no. 1984 and is endowed with the ground line as well,<sup>11</sup> a paste at Berlin, Muenzkabinett, no. 1628 (the ground line is provided too)<sup>12</sup> and the reverse of a Roman coin type struck in 85 BC by C. Julius Bursio which is known by only one coin; the only surviving example is preserved at Paris, Cabinet des Medailles, no. A 10778.<sup>13</sup> All of these examples date to the late- or post-Sullan times and have been cut or struck at Rome. As we shall see, these facts are not without a meaning.

As the epigram makes clear, the obvious message of the Eros who breaks the thunderbolt is that the fire of Eros is more powerful than that of Zeus, i. e. that Eros is the real ruler of the universe.

<sup>9</sup> See Maaskant-Kleibrink 1978: 138, no. 206 and Hermary 1986: 928, note 947.

<sup>10</sup> See, e. g., Horster 1970: pls. 1, figs. 1–2; 3, figs. 3–4; 4, figs. 2–4; 8, figs. 1 and 3; 9, figs. 1 and 4; 10, fig. 3; 11, fig. 4; 12, figs. 1 and 4; 13, figs. 1 and 3–4; 15, figs. 3 and 4; 16, fig. 1; 17, figs. 1–4; 18, figs. 1–2 and 4; 19, figs. 1–2 and 4; 20, figs. 1–2 and 4; 21, figs. 1–4.

<sup>11</sup> Maaskant-Kleibrink 1978: 84, no. 29.

<sup>12</sup> See Furtwaengler 1896: 90, no. 1628.

<sup>13</sup> See Crawford 1974: 368–369, no. 2.

The sinuous conception of Eros shown on these miniature copies is close to that of the god on a cornelian gem signed by Olympius<sup>14</sup> which dates to around 370 BC (fig. 3). In both cases



Fig. 3

the torso of the god is bent forward, the legs are disposed according to an oblique line, the leg which rests on the ground line is bent at the knee both arms are outstretched in order that the hands hold the weapon which in the case of Olympius' gem is the bow. Moreover in both cases the hair is composed of long, wavy locks. The age of our Eros *Ceraunophorus* is that of a 15–16 years old boy and is thus close to that of late classical Erotes, such as the Centocelle Eros, the Farnese – Steinhäuser Eros and the Eros from *Parium*.<sup>15</sup>

Thus he looks a little older than the Eros by Lysippus.<sup>16</sup> The Eros of Lysippus appears to have been inspired by our Eros: in both cases the torso is bent forward, the two arms are outstretched in order to hold the weapon and are one parallel to the other both hands hold the instrument which is brought across according to a diagonal line. However our Eros is earlier because he is still in the late classical tradition of pubescent Erotes.

Let us enter into the details of our Eros *Ceraunophorus*.

The locks of hair brought behind and collected in a chignon probably characterized already the Eros of *Parium* as it is argued from his reproduction on coins.<sup>17</sup> This feature confirms the pertinence of our type to the late classical Erotes.

<sup>14</sup> See Ridgway 1990: pl. 36 and Lang 2004: 153.

<sup>15</sup> See Damaskos 2007: 134–135, no. 33; Plantzos 2007: 138–139, no. 35; Mposnakis 2007: 140–141, no. 36.

<sup>16</sup> See, e. g., Maderna 2004: 303–382, particularly figs. 314–317.

<sup>17</sup> See Touratsoglou: 72, no. 4.

The eyes look hard to the thunderbolt and suggest a comparison with the corresponding features of several works attributed to Scopas.<sup>18</sup> Moreover in the best miniature copy of our type it is possible to see a shadow all around the eye bulb: that suggests that the portrayed statue was characterized with deep eyes – sockets and as a consequence by a pathetic eye. This is another well known feature of Scopadic creations.<sup>19</sup> The wavy locks collected behind in a chignon characterize the Pothos.<sup>20</sup> The stocky head is also a well known Scopadic feature.<sup>21</sup> The strong, aggressive nose is also well within the Scopadic anatomic grammar of faces.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the predilection for representations of bodies according to diagonal lines is another well known feature of the Scopadic conception of figures as it is confirmed by several figures of the pediments of the temple of Athena Alea at Tegea<sup>23</sup> as well as by the Pothos,<sup>24</sup> perhaps by the Phaeton<sup>25</sup> as well as by several figures on friezes of the Maussoleum which are traditionally associated with Scopas.<sup>26</sup>

The muscular conception of body and his nervous attitude are also typical of creations which are attributed to Scopas.<sup>27</sup>

The unavoidable conclusion is that the attribution to Scopas was the right one. The attribution of the *Cupido fulmen tenens* to Praxiteles may have become established because of the standard association of the Athenian master with Eros.

Since the portrait of Alcibiades is thought to have been the first endowed with the sense of *pathos*<sup>28</sup>, Scopas' study of this

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<sup>18</sup> See Todisco 1993: figs. 138 (Maenad), 142–145 (heads from Tegea), 150 (Pothos), 154–155 (Triton).

<sup>19</sup> See Todisco 1993: figs. 138 (Maenad), 142–145 (heads from Tegea), 150 (Pothos), 154–155 (Triton).

<sup>20</sup> See Todisco 1993: fig. 150.

<sup>21</sup> See Todisco 1993: figs. 138 (Maenad), 142–145 (heads from Tegea), 150 (Pothos), 154–155 (Triton).

<sup>22</sup> See e. g. Todisco 1993: figs. 143 and 145 (Tegea).

<sup>23</sup> See Stewart 1977: pl. 53.

<sup>24</sup> See Todisco 1993: figs. 138 (Maenad), 142–145 (heads from Tegea), 150 (Pothos), 154–155 (Triton).

<sup>25</sup> See Stewart 1977: pl. 45 (b).

<sup>26</sup> See Stewart 1977: pl. 40 and Cook 2005: pls. 2–15.

<sup>27</sup> See the examples in notes 17–25.



subject may have been crucial toward his establishment of an aesthetic based on *pathos*.

Concerning the date of Scopas' Eros *Ceraunophorus* the comparison with the above mentioned very similar Archer Eros by Olympius, which dates to around 370 BC, suggests that this statue also dates to around 370. Thus it should be regarded one of the earliest works by Scopas.

Thanks to this commission, Scopas may have become well introduced at Athens and perhaps in the world of the Academy of Plato. The Academy of Plato was also closely linked to Mausolus: Eudoxus from Cnidus, a former pupil of Plato, after his studies at Athens in the Academy ended moved to the court of Mausolus and settled in Caria.<sup>29</sup> Thus it is possible that Scopas was able to reach Maussolus and the important commissions offered by the wealthy satrap of Caria through the world of the Academy.

It should be specified that Scopas understood the new times much better than other contemporary artists: in fact, many of his works were commissioned not by the traditional Greek poleis but by autocrats such as Maussolus and Philip II: the latter was the likely patron of his works on Samothrace.<sup>30</sup>

The new absolutistic ruler was perceived close to the gods who command the sensual satisfaction of instincts – such as Dionysus, Aphrodite, Eros, etc. – and thus was thought to spread the *pathos* in the world: of course this trend will peak with the figure of Alexander the Great<sup>31</sup> but began exactly with the new life style introduced by Alcibiades.<sup>32</sup>

A lot of Scopas' activity was devoted to fleshing out deities who were fashionable at the time (Aphrodite, Pothos, Maenad).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Shapiro 2009: 236–263, particularly 246 and 261, note 40.

<sup>29</sup> See Corso 2007: 173–197.

<sup>30</sup> See Pliny 36. 25: Corso 1988: 511–739, particularly 555–556, note 2 to 36. 25). Concerning the activity of Scopas for Mausolus, see Vitruvius 7 *praeformatio* 12 and Pliny 36. 30–31.

<sup>31</sup> See e. g. Moreno 2004.

<sup>32</sup> See Shapiro (note 7).

<sup>33</sup> See Stewart 1977: 127–135, *testimonia* nos. 3–5; 17; 26; 29–31.

Coming back to the *Cupido fulmen tenens*, this statue was moved from Athens to Rome because Pliny saw it in the *Urbs*.

It is probable that Sulla looted the statue in 86 BC, when he burned Athens and stripped this city of many works of art because, as we have seen, this iconography is shown at Rome on a coin type of the following year – 85 BC – as well as on gems of the late- and post-Sullan period. It is likely that the well known devotion of Sulla to *Venus*,<sup>34</sup> the wish to exhibit the statue as a trophy of Rome's victory and the prestige of Platonic themes in the golden period of the 5<sup>th</sup> Academy contributed to the iconographic fortune of this *opus nobile*.

Perhaps the statue at Rome was set up in the *porticus Metelli*<sup>35</sup> because the *porticus Octaviae* where Pliny saw it will be constituted in the same area of the previous *porticus Metelli*.<sup>36</sup>

The enduring fortune of the iconography of Eros *Ceraunophorus* is shown by a Roman late-republican paste at Berlin which shows Eros leaning on a pillar with a thyrus in his left hand and a thunderbolt in his right hand.<sup>37</sup>

The statue will be again set up in the *porticus Octaviae* which substituted the previous *porticus Metelli* in the 20s BC. The *curia Octaviae* where the statue was erected is identified with the great exhedra which was behind the two temples of *June Regina* and *Juppiter Stator*.<sup>38</sup> This setting of the statue is coherent with the placing in the same building complex of an Aphrodite by Phidias (Pliny 36. 15) and of Praxiteles' Eros from Thespiae (Pliny 36. 22).

Phidias' Aphrodite may have been brought from Athens together with the Eros *Ceraunophorus* at the time of Sulla and thus its moving may be explained with the previously mentioned devotion of Sulla to *Venus*.

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<sup>34</sup> On Sullan sack of Athens see Christ 2002: 83–93. Works of art looted by Sulla during his eastern campaigns: Celani 1998: 78–84. Devotion of Sulla to *Venus*: see Fadinger 2002: 155–188.

<sup>35</sup> See Viscogliosi 1999<sub>1</sub>: 130–132.

<sup>36</sup> See Viscogliosi 1999<sub>2</sub>: 141–145.

<sup>37</sup> See Furtwaengler 1900: 209, pl. 43, fig. 55.

<sup>38</sup> See Viscogliosi 1999<sub>2</sub>: 141–145.

On the contrary, the Eros of Thespieae by Praxiteles was removed by Caligula, returned by Claudius and eventually brought back to Rome by Nero (Pausanias 9. 27. 3-5).

The emphasis given to love deities in the decoration of the *porticus Octaviae* is probably due to the circumstance that *Venus* was the *Aeneadum genetrix* and that the *gens Julia* which ruled the empire from August to Nero, claimed to descend from this goddess.

Probably during the Augustan age Dionysius, the curator of the sanctuary of Aphrodite at Side, dedicated a statue of Eros with the thunderbolt.<sup>39</sup> The following metric inscription was inscribed on the round base of the statue:

κάμὲ τὸ[ν Ἀφρογενο]ῦς Διονύ[σι]ος εἶσεν Ἔρωτα  
τὴν αὐτὴν [τιμὴν Παίον]ι πατρὶ λαχὼν,  
ἐν παλάμαι με φέροντα πυριφλεγέ[θ]οντα κεραυνόν,  
ὃν ποτε Κύκλωπες τεῦξαν ἄνακ[τ]ι θεῶν,  
Ζητὶ βαρυβρε[μ]έται, δεικνὺς ὅτι καὶ ὀλίγωι μο[ι]  
μειζότερα δύναμις γίνεται ε[ὑ]περυ[γ]ω[ι].

Διονύσιος Παίονος | τοῦ Πολυχάρου Μαλεις | ἐπιστάτης  
γενό[μ]ενος | Ἀφροδίτη

"Dionysius set up also me, Eros the son of the born from the foam having got this honour for the father Paeon bringing in my hand's palm the blazing as fire thunderbolt which once the Cyclops lighted for the lord of gods, for loud-thundering Zeus, showing that although I am small the well-winged has a greater power. Dionysius Maleis of Paeon of Polychares having become curator to Aphrodite".

Probably the statue of Side was a copy or a variation of that in *curia Octaviae* because Dionysius' epigram asserts the same concept – that Eros is more powerful than Zeus – which is enunciated in the above quoted ekphrastic epigram which supposedly describes the statue seen by Pliny.

<sup>39</sup> See Merkelbach, Stauber 2002: 149–150, no. 18 / 15 / 07 Side.

During the age of Nero the above quoted epigram of the *Anthologia Graeca* was composed.<sup>40</sup> Of course the age of Nero must have been a good time for the dissemination of this iconography: this emperor must have liked the life style of Alcibiades!

In the same period a sardonix formerly in the Poniatowski collection was cut: it shows Eros ready to strike his thunderbolt held in his raised left hand: Blanckenhagen thought that this figure was inspired by the *episema* of Alcibiades' shield<sup>41</sup> but I find its style typical of the Neronian baroque and thus I regard it rather as a re-invention of this pattern. In any case this gem shows the favour enjoyed by this iconography during the Neronian period.

Pliny wrote about our statue in 78 AD. Perhaps it burned with the great fire which destroyed much of the porticus Octaviae in 80 AD: Praxiteles' Eros of Thespieae also burned in the same occasion.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See Corso 1988<sub>2</sub>: 286, note 675.

<sup>41</sup> See Blanckenhagen 1964: fig. 1.

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