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EXEKIAS & CO. Evidence of cooperative work in the workshop of Exekias, Group E and their associates.

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Abstract

Anyone who has worked closely on the pots of Exekias will have wrestled with the problem of some 'B-sides', where certain characteristic stylistic features on the reverse do not coincide with those on the obverse. The problem is particularly to be seen on the vases of Exekias' middle phase, several of which present a superbly observed obverse, teamed with a reverse that is by comparison noticeably less impressive in composition and execution.¹ Although one must allow for artistic variation of quality, it is puzzling to encounter a divergence of style² from obverse to reverse of the same vase: within days, if not hours, the master apparently represented numerous small and relatively insignificant details of human and equine anatomy in a quite different way, thus running counter to the expectations of Morellian attribution. Some of these 'alternative' details recur in scenes by painters variously identified as Near Group E, Manner of Exekias, Near Exekias, as well as the Lysippides Painter and his Manner, on vases that in some cases present other similarities to Exekias' works.³ These scenes cannot be attributed to Exekias, but the phenomenon calls for a reconsideration of how we understand the relationships between members of a group of vase-painters working close to one another, and also challenges our purist expectation that an ancient vase-painting is the jealously guarded creation of a single hand.

¹ Two of the most striking examples are Orvieto, Faina 2745, and Boulogne 558: see E.A. Mackay, *Tradition and Originality: A Study of Exekias* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010): chs. 17 and 21.

² In Beazley's definition of the word (*ABV* 'Instructions for use' p. x).

³ Heide Mommsen has identified similarities of potting and of some painted elements between Exekias' vases and a cluster of amphorae within Group E – her 'Stesias Group' – as 'das Ergebnis einer zeitweiligen Werkstattgemeinschaft zwischen Exekias und der E-Gruppe': p. 33 of her 'Zur Auswertung von Formfotos und Profilzeichnung', in Martin Bentz (ed.), *Vasenforschung und Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum – Standortbestimmung und Perspektiven. CVA Deutschland Beiheft 1* (Munich: Beck, 2002): 23-36.