



MELUSA'S PRIZE

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The handsome Greek drinking cup illustrated above was acquired by the Museum this year. It is an early example of the eye kylix (named from the two enormous talismans against the evil eye which decorate either side), a type introduced into Attic pottery in the thirties of the sixth century B.C. Under the handles and between the eyes on one side are spirited battle scenes. On the other side a warrior leads away a woman captive.

What makes our new kylix unique is an inscription scratched on the bottom in a western Greek alphabet and a western (or "Doric") dialect. Since the vase is said to have been found at Tarentum, the dialect is probably Tarentine, and we should transliterate:

Μελώσας ἡμὶ νικατήριον ξαίνωσα τὰς κόρας ἐνίκη.

"I am Melosa's prize. She won the girls' carding contest."

That contests were held in carding—the work of disentangling the fibers of the wool and drawing them out parallel to one another preparatory to spinning—was not known to us earlier. Fine wool was a specialty of Tarentum, and it is possible that local pride gave

rise to contests in woolworking there. Or might the contest have had some connection with a religious observance—the making, say, of a garment to be offered to Athena, like the famous peplos presented at the Panathenaia in Athens?

The brief glimpse at women's doings in the ancient world afforded by our inscription is made particularly tantalizing by the name of the prize winner, Melosa, or, as it would be in Attic and the common dialect, Melusa. On four Attic vases of the fifth century B.C. this name is given to mythological characters, a circumstance which seems at first glance to speak very badly for the owner of our kylix. For mythological names were for the most part avoided by people of good standing in the pre-Roman period, particularly in the times preceding the fourth century. The hetairai, on the other hand, showed a marked fondness for them. Consequently there is a strong presumption that a woman who bore such a name was a hetaira.

It is hard to believe, however, that our Melusa was anything but a nice girl. True, it has been argued that the fact that a woman

spins does not guarantee her respectability. For we see a spinner on an Attic vase being offered a purse by a young man, and that he is her husband and is giving her money for household expenses is not likely, since it was the men of the family who did the marketing in ancient Athens. Woolworking was evidently not limited to the respectable. But to spin in one's spare time is one thing; to enter a woolworking contest, win a prize, and then preserve that prize so carefully that it could be buried with one—for that is presumably the way in which the kylix survived—is quite another. It surely bespeaks ardor and pride in domestic pursuits.

The difficulty is not so great as might be supposed. The circumstances in which the name Melusa is given to mythological characters on the four fifth-century Attic vases mentioned above are so unusual that it has been suggested that the name was not properly a mythological one but must have belonged to some contemporary beauty whom the vase-painters delighted to honor in this way.

The name itself is the present active participle of the verb *melo*, which means (1) to care for or take an interest in something or (2) to be an object of care or solicitude. The second meaning is more likely to predominate in Melusa, which we may compare with *melema*, a term of endearment used by the lover to his lass and the sister to her brother. Melema, too, appears as a woman's name in an epitaph from the Crimea. "Darling" is as close as we can get in English to either word. Both must originally have been pet names. Such pet names often displaced the given name, were passed on to descendants, and ended by becoming part of the regular store of given names. This happened in Athens to a number of pet names of women formed from the adjectives "sweet," "little," and "dear," all borne by respectable members of society.

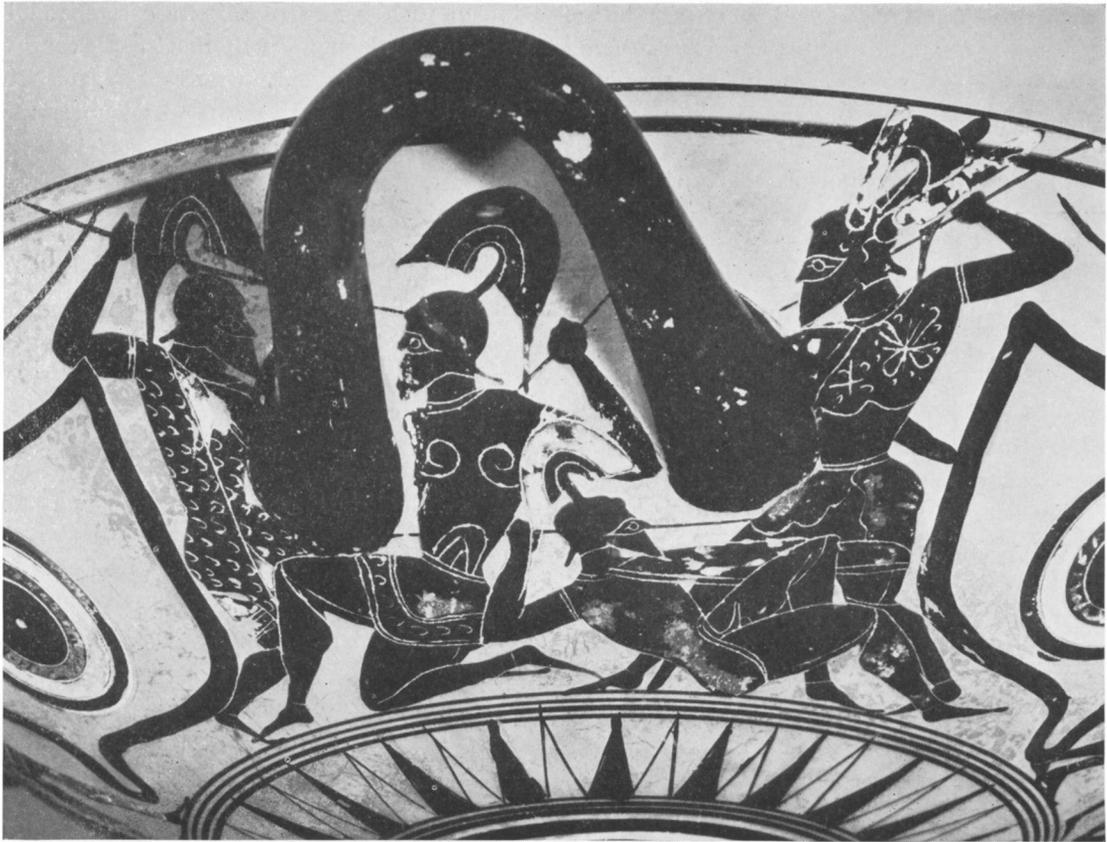
It must be noted, however, that feminine names in the form of present active participles were not in favor with the Athenians, who considered them more appropriate for their warships than for their daughters. Though

sixteen such names of ships are recorded in Attic naval documents of the fourth century B.C. (and Greek ships were never named after actual persons), there seems to be no certain instance of an Athenian citizen with a name of this type before the Roman age. But this prejudice may not have existed in Tarentum. In view of our relative ignorance of Tarentine—as opposed to Attic—names, we must be content for the present to assume that Melusa was a pet name that had displaced the given name of our little prize-winner or of some ancestress from whom she had inherited it and that it was no reflection on her character.

The above may serve to give the reader some notion of the large, complex, and fascinating subject of Greek names of persons. Lest he should turn from these intricacies and object that the prize itself, a large drinking cup, suggests that Melusa was no better than she should be, I must add that, if we are to believe the comic poets, most Greek women liked to drink. A deep cup from Boeotia in the Louvre is evidence of a sympathetic husband's provision for this taste. It bears the inscription, "Mogea gives as a gift to his wife Eucharis, daughter of Eutretiphantos, a cup that she may drink her fill."



Inscription on the foot of the vase shown on the opposite page, an Attic black-figured eye kylix recently acquired by the Museum. About 535 B.C.



Battle scene. Detail of the kylix shown on page 110

The accession number of the cup is 44.11.1. Its height is $4 \frac{13}{16}$ inches. It is intact except for a few small breaks on one side. The surface around the inscription is somewhat obscured by incrustation and root marks, some of which go over the incisions. This explains a former faulty reading published by Bloesch, *Formen attischer Schalen*, p. 8. The most comprehensive modern work on Greek names of persons is *Die historischen Personennamen des Griechischen bis zur Kaiserzeit* by Fr. Bechtel. Nicknames, pet names, and names of women are discussed in *Die einstämmigen männlichen Personennamen des Griechischen die aus Spitznamen hervorgegangen sind* and *Die attischen Frauennamen nach ihrem Systeme dargestellt* by the same author. The vases with the name *Melusa* are described and

various theories about them are summarized by Lamer in Pauly, *Wissowa, and Kroll*, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, xv, cols. 591 ff. The problem is more involved than has hitherto been realized and will be treated at length in an article in a scientific journal. The vases themselves are assigned to their several painters by J. D. Beazley in *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*, pp. 677 ff. A list of names of Greek ships is given by F. Miltner in Pauly, *Wissowa, and Kroll*, op. cit., supplement v, cols. 947 ff. For controversy on the relative symbolic value of the distaff and the purse see J. D. Beazley, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, LI (1931), p. 121, and Rodenwaldt, *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1932, cols. 7 ff. For the Boeotian inscription see *Inscriptiones graecae* VII, 3467.