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The Riace Bronzes. Recent Research and New Scientific Knowledge

The two Riace Bronzes, now in the Archaeological Museum of Reggio Calabria (Italy), are almost intact, perfect in their heroic nudity. By comparing their proportions and their pose, we can certainly accept that the two statues resemble each other and that no other statue or painting resembles any one of them. The artist deliberately wanted to make the two heroes resemble each other. The Bronzes form a statuary group of unitary conception [11].

First, I would like to summarize the scientific data concerning the two statues:

- the dating: mid-5th century B.C. [1];
- the analysis of the the clay cores, carried out in Rome and in Glasgow, shows that the two statues were made in Argos, in the Peloponnese, in the same period [10];
- the non-Attic style [5; 7];
- the long exposure to the public [8];
- the statues were brought to Rome after a looting of Argos [8];
- they were restored in Rome, during the Augustan period [8];
- after the restoration, the Bronzes appeared glossy black [3].

In Statue A, the Augustan restoration concerned the helmet and the shield. In Statue B, after making a cast, a new right arm and the left forearm were fused and assembled. Similar operations of restoration, with the casting and fusion of new pieces, are known in Rome for two other very important Greek bronze statues: the horse and the bull found in the archaeological excavations of Vicolo delle Terme (now in the Museo dei Conservatori, in Rome) [9].

In order to hide the difference in color with the original parts, the Bronzes were coated in black, with a sulfur-based paint. Koichi Hada (Christian University of Tokyo) has hypothesized the black color was applied after the Roman restoration. Giovanni Buccolieri (University of Salento) has identified clear traces of the paint with sulfur on the surface of the Riace Bronzes [3].

The Bronze A, unique among all the ancient Greek statues, shows a band positioned at the height of the forehead. According to some scholars, it must be identified as a royal diadem [2], even if it is not very visible under the helmet and it has no terminal parts that overlap on the shoulders, as it usually happens. In our opinion, it is a realistic element, without any comparison among the ancient surviving works: a fabric protection keeping the metal of the Corinthian helmet not directly in contact with the skin.

The sure presence of a Corinthian helmet on the head of the Bronze A is demonstrated by traces — still perfectly legible — on the statues [8]: the triangular marks that are on the band,



Fig. 1. The supports for the Corinthian helmet of the Bronze A.



Fig. 2. The supports for the Corinthian helmet of the Bronze A.

placed at the height of the meninges (Fig. 1; Fig. 2). These supports fit perfectly to the recess that existed between the paragnatids (the protections for the cheeks) and the neck protection of the Corinthian helmet. They were used to fix the helmet on the head of the statue. The second evidence is the flat surface on the nape of Statue A, which fits perfectly to the back of a Corinthian helmet. It is important to note that only the helmets of the mid-5th century B.C. are compatible with the traces found on the statues. Thirdly, it is necessary to observe an unnatural bulge of hair, for which the only justification is that it was useful to provide further support to the helmet. The fourth element is given by the support bar, which was to guarantee the stability of the helmet, placed on the top part of the head. The original pin, as can be seen from the remaining marks, must have been broken in antiquity then replaced with a stronger one in the Augustan period. The previous bar was sawed and hammered to make it no longer visible (Ill. 5).

About the presence of a Corinthian helmet on the head of the Statue B there has never been any doubt, since the skullcap of the statue seems deformed to allow keeping a helmet stable without the aid of any support. The Statue B was embellished by a detail particularly rare on ancient statues. On the forehead there is a copper triangle, which represents the front part of the cap, while, at the height of the holes for the eyes on the Corinthian helmet, a rectangle, always in the same metal, made the observer able to understand that the cap covered the entire head. Turning to the side view, the signs are even more numerous: the top of the ears appears just sketched, with a hole that indicates the application of an added element, and the trace of the strap, which deeply marks the beard on both cheeks (Ill. 6). These two elements certify the presence of earflaps and chinstrap in the cap, while the three supports, which protrude unnaturally from the nape, have not found a convincing explanation yet: in our opinion, they testify the presence of a thin element, a sort of leather neck roll, positioned under the support for the back of the helmet.

The solution of the enigma is possible by crossing numismatic, archaeological and literary sources.

The coins give us the exact reconstruction of the cap and the leather neck roll, associated with the heads of warrior deities, generals, tyrants and kings. We present, *exempli gratia*, the head of the hero Timoleon, on the bronze coins of Syracuse, or Mars on the silver drachmas of Rome. On the red-figure vases there are many examples of this neck roll inserted into a cap with earflaps and chinstrap, as in the case of Hector portrayed by the Boston Painter (Fig. 3). Although it is more difficult to recognize, because marble made the creation of this element

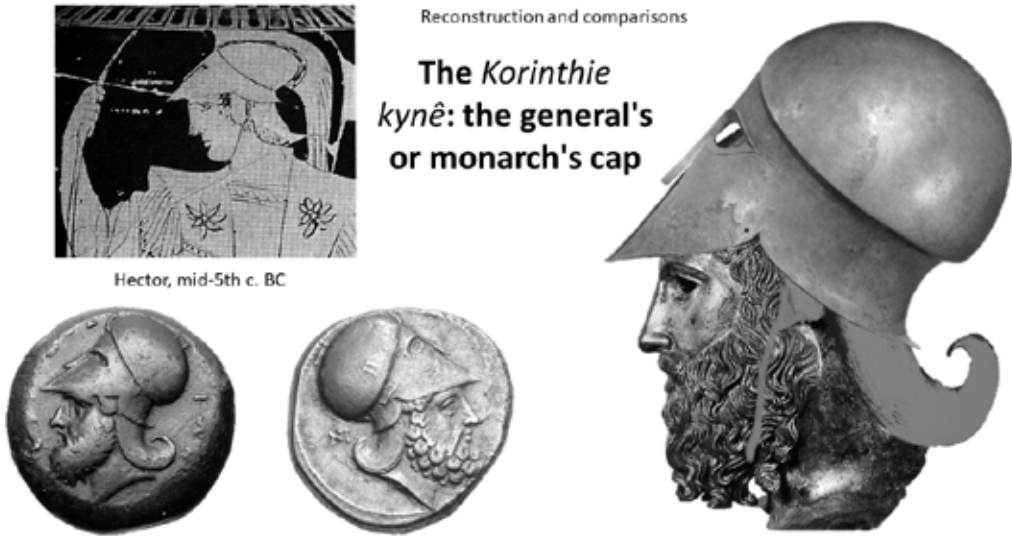


Fig. 3. Reconstruction and comparison for the kynê of the Bronze B.

complicated for the sculptors, the leather neck roll is often found in many statues of heroes and deities, such as Athena and Mars.

Literary sources help us to understand the function of this cap: the Greek name is *korinthie kynê* [4; 6]. It consists of a leather cap with earflaps, a chinstrap and a leather neck guard. Its function, explicitly witnessed in many passages, was to identify the military commander and the king or tyrant. The *kynê*, with its leather neck roll painted in red, allowed the hoplites to recognize their leader from behind.

The signs left by the hoplite shields are evident. They clearly testify the presence of very large defense weapons, such as those of the Greek warriors, discarding all hypotheses concerning non-functional weapons or shields linked to peltasts or lightly armed soldiers. The hoplite shield, characterized by *porpax* and *antilabu*, was certainly present in the both bronze statues.

Equally clear are the signs of the presence of a spear on the Statue A. The Romans restored the spear of the Statue B, which was accidentally broken, welding the two sections and using as glue the molten lead inside the cable of the hand.

Next, we need to find ancient comparisons related to the two statues, given the objective datum that they do not exist for the Classical or Hellenistic period.

In 91 A.D. the poet Publius Papinius Statius published his *Thebaid*, a monumental epic poem focused on the story of the Seven against Thebes, the Argive warriors who fought to ensure Polynices' power over the city of Thebes in Boeotia. Polynices' brother Eteocles was the tyrant after their father Oedipus' abdication.

Reading the verses that Statius dedicated to the agitated phases that preceded the clash between Eteocles and Polynices we can suppose that the poet must have taken inspiration from a bronze statuary group that he undoubtedly knew in detail, because it was exposed in Rome, probably in the Imperial Palatium.

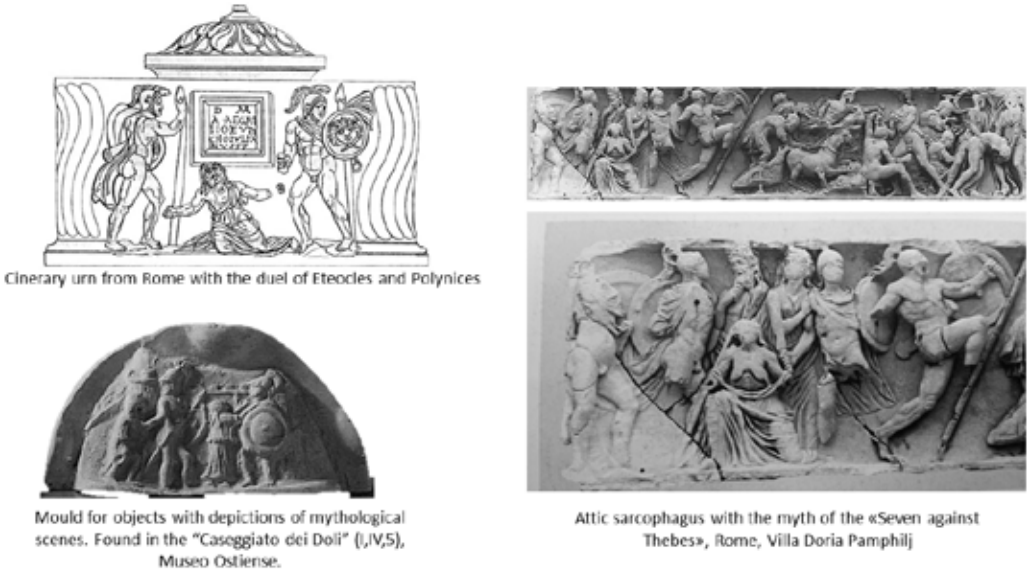


Fig. 4. Comparisons for the Fratricides group made by Pythagoras of Rhegion

However, in order to fully understand their history, we must first discuss the representations of the duel between Eteocles and Polynices that are present in the ancient world. The ways to represent the fratricidal clash may be related essentially to two main schemes: in the one, which we like to define as “Etruscan”, we find the two brothers in the act of mortally wounding each other; the other one, with the provenance of the finds showing that it was concentrated around Rome, is most probably inspired by the *Fratricides* by Pythagoras.

In this second model, the moment preceding the clash is represented with five characters (not all of them always represented on the remaining archaeological finds, but with different schemes that may include three or four of them). All the known works of art that draw inspiration from the *Fratricides* by Pythagoras show a warrior with an angry face, which closely resembled the expression on the face of Bronze A. We will shortly be discussing the identity of these five characters and the misinterpretation by the Roman poet. For the moment, we must recapitulate what has emerged from our analysis and studies: Statius, at the end of the 1st century B.C., and Tatianus, in his *Oratio ad Graecos* in the 2nd century A.D., saw the *Fratricides* in Rome [8], whose presence is also confirmed by the sarcophagi, cinerary urns and terracotta matrices that were inspired by them, as well as by a marble copy of one of the bronzes (now at the Musée royal des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels, but coming from the Palatine) that were found in Rome (Fig. 4).

Book XI, verses 262–402 of the *Thebaid* are dedicated to the phases preceding the fratricidal duel. Five characters take turn in talking, often with diametrically opposed versions. The first one who introduces himself is Creon, uncle of Eteocles and Polynices and brother of Iocasta. He accuses Eteocles of cowardice; he encourages his nephew to fight against Polynices for the tyranny over the city of Thebes, since all evils were caused by his perjured attitude towards his brother. Eteocles is persuaded and arms himself, but is reached at the city gate by his mother

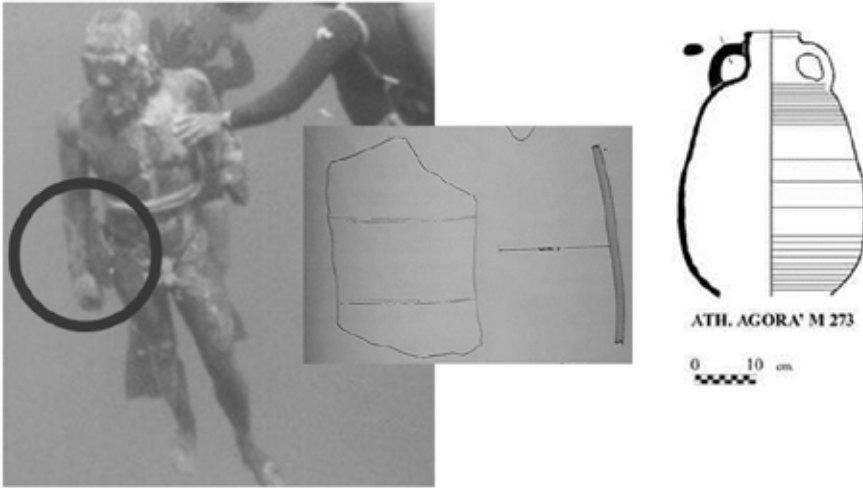


Fig. 5. A fragment of an Athenian Agora M 273 amphora inserted between the right arm and the right thigh of the Bronze A.

Iocasta, who presents herself to him disheveled and with naked breast, full of scratches. She tries to convince her son not to fight, but does not achieve the expected result. At the same time, Antigone tries to talk to his brother Polynices from the high of a tower, and succeeds in moving the hero, and almost in persuading him to desist from the massacre. But, when everything seems to be solving itself, Eteocles leaves the gate, overcoming his mother's guard, whose sight inflames the brother with anger (Staius uses the Latin expression *hostile tuens*, "looking at him with anger") because he presents himself with all the signs of royalty: a large court, rich horse tack for the mount, and, above all, wearing the *regia cassia*, the king's helmet (the *кунк* of Bronze B), which reminds Polynices of the object of dispute. All the mediation attempts are then thwarted, and the duel becomes inevitable.

The dependence of these verses on Pythagoras' works appears to be evident when observing, during the reading of the Latin text, an image of the *Fratricides* statuary group in its most completed form, such as the one recognizable in the left part of the front of the Attic sarcophagus from Villa Doria Pamphilj in Rome (Fig. 4). In the epos, as we have seen, the talks of five characters follow each other, and they seem to correspond to those present on the sarcophagus: Eteocles, Polynices, Iocasta, Antigone and Creon. The *Fratricides* statues, as can be seen, are used by Staius as actors of a tragedy seen on stage: nothing has happened yet, and everything has already been decided.

Every piece of the jigsaw seems to take its place, but some details are not entirely convincing. First: who is the old woman who, with naked breast and with disheveled hair, tries to separate the two brothers? Is it Iocasta, as Staius believes, or is it Epicaste or Euryganeia, who in other versions of the myth presents herself as mother of Eteocles, Polynices, Antigone and Ismene, leaving to the Attic version the whole burden of unclean sons, generated by Oedipus and his mother Iocasta? Stronger perplexities refer to the figure of the old man wearing a himation whom, according to Staius, we identified as Creon, but who is represented in the

same premonitory gesture as the one of the soothsayers of the eastern pediment in Olympia. Is it indeed Creon, or are we supposed to identify him with Tiresias the soothsayer, who in all the versions of the Theban myth has a central role?

The “Lille Papyrus” handed down to us a possible fragment of the *Thebaid*, in which we can read a part of the speech that the mother (whose name was not maintained: Iocasta/Epicaste or Euryganeia?) addresses to her sons Eteocles and Polynices. The woman tries to convince the two brothers to accept a blind draw: one of the two would receive the government of the city of Thebes and the other all the movable goods and the wealth in return for his departure in exile. The prophecy of death in case of duel between the two brothers, previously pronounced by Tiresias the soothsayer, who was present during the speech, hovers over the protagonists, leading them towards an agreement. Precisely based on the verb *epithonto* in the verse 234, which means “they agreed”, philologists believed they could temporally place the mother’s speech immediately after Oedipus’ abdication. According to this theory, Polynices would have extracted from the *kynk* the fate of exile and would have eventually organized the expedition against his own Homeland. But, in our opinion, some important elements contrast with this hypothesis. Firstly, as we can note, if Polynices had accepted a blind draw and had left Thebes on his own free will, what justification would he have had to go back to his Homeland with his weapons in hand? What would his brother Eteocles’ guilt have been? In the various versions of the myth, and as Statius himself highlights many times through his characters, Polynices fights against his Homeland because the original deal with his brother (according to which they were supposed to reign one year each) was betrayed. We wonder, then, if Adrastus, the king of Argos known for his justice, could ever accept to organize an expedition not based on an evident injustice, but the result of a thirst of power, with no legal or moral justification, in defiance of an agreement signed by both parties. In addition to this, immediately after the end of the mother’s speech, it is possible to understand from the few fragments that are still legible, that Tiresias must have spoken, and, besides, there seems to be an exchange between Oedipus’ sons and the soothsayer. Finally, in verse 282, we can read the adverb *ainm[s]* related to Polynices, which means “angrily” and which correlates both with Statius’ expression “*hostile tuens*” (“looking at him in anger”), and with the facial expression of Bronze A.

Therefore, in our opinion, the mother’s speech is to be chronologically placed on the battlefield, while the two brothers are about to confront each other. In our reconstruction, the story would have been this: at the act of Oedipus’ abdication, the two brothers would have agreed on reigning one year each; the first one to rule would have been Eteocles, who in this version of the myth is the eldest of the two, contrary to what appears in the tragedies performed in Athens. After a year, Polynices would have been expelled from the government and exiled; the youth, therefore, would have left for Argos, where he would have married Adrastus’ daughter. After the marriage, his father-in-law Adrastus, king of Argos, would have organized a military expedition in order to restore to his son-in-law the government of Thebes. After a series of fights, it comes to the will of ending the war beneath the walls of Thebes with a resolute duel between the two brothers; while they are about to fight each other, their mother would have intervened to stop her sons, supported by her daughter Antigone and by Tiresias the soothsayer; her proposal to divide the goods between the two brothers, after an initial acceptance, would have been rejected; in the end, the duel, as foreseen by the soothsayer, proves to be fatal for both contenders.

Our reconstruction (Ill. 7), based on the analysis and the evaluation of all the data in our possession (from reading and integration of the originally existing attributes on the Bronzes, to the archaeometric evaluations concerning the casting materials; from the literary sources related to known archaeological comparisons; from iconography to history), leads to the conclusion that we find ourselves before a true and proper *unicum* in the history of Greek art. Apart from the extraordinary technical and artistic quality of the two statues from Riace, we are able to read the source of inspiration of the bronze craftsman who realized them, and who, according to us, is Pythagoras of Rhegion.

As regards the history of the statues from Riace, we must emphasize how writer and geographer Pausanias did not see the *Fratricides* in Argos. In our opinion, the absence from Argos proves that they had been looted by the Romans in a previous era, most probably during the turpitudes of the Mithridatic War and of the fights between Marius and Sulla, which both took place in the 1st century B.C. Between the 2nd century A.D. and 1972, date of the discovery of the Bronzes, we have the absolute silence of the sources, except for the detail of one fragment of late Roman amphora (of the Athenian Agora M 273 type), still placed between the right hand and the right thigh of the Statue A (Fig. 5). This fragment allows us to hypothesize a last trip of the Bronzes, from Rome to Constantinople. We know that at the beginning of the 4th century A.D., Constantine the Great transferred to the new capital of the empire the entire imperial collection of masterpieces that was in Rome. This affirmation is proved by the 2nd book of the *Anthologia Palatina*, dedicated to the statues of the Gymnasium of Zeuxippos, transported there directly from Rome. It was on this occasion that the merchant ship that carried them stopped in a port in the territory of Kaulonia, today Porto Forticchio, and then shipwrecked nearby, for unknown reasons.

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Title. The Riace Bronzes. Recent Research and New Scientific Knowledge.

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Abstract. It is necessary to highlight how the recent analyses on the casting materials of the two Riace statues have demonstrated that the two Bronzes were made in Argos, in the Peloponnese, in the same period and in the same workshop. These results must be included in any discussion of the Riace Bronzes.

In our paper, we identify the Bronzes with the famous *Fratricides* group by Pythagoras of Rhegion. To support this case, we can now rely on another element of clarification: the “Lille Papyrus”. A fragment of Stesichorus survives, with an extraordinary stroke of luck. This passage offers us the speech that the mother of Eteocles and Polynices addresses to her sons who are about to confront each other in a mortal duel. The scene can be correlated very closely with the stance and characteristics of the Riace Bronzes. We can even see these statues as actors on a stage! A concept of art that seems highly modern, but still dates back to the Severe Style, the first period in which the Greeks created an art of perfect mimesis, imitation of reality.

Keywords: Greek archaeology; iconography; Greek art; bronzes of Riace; Greek sculpture.

Название статьи. Бронзы из Риаче. Последние исследования и новые научные данные.

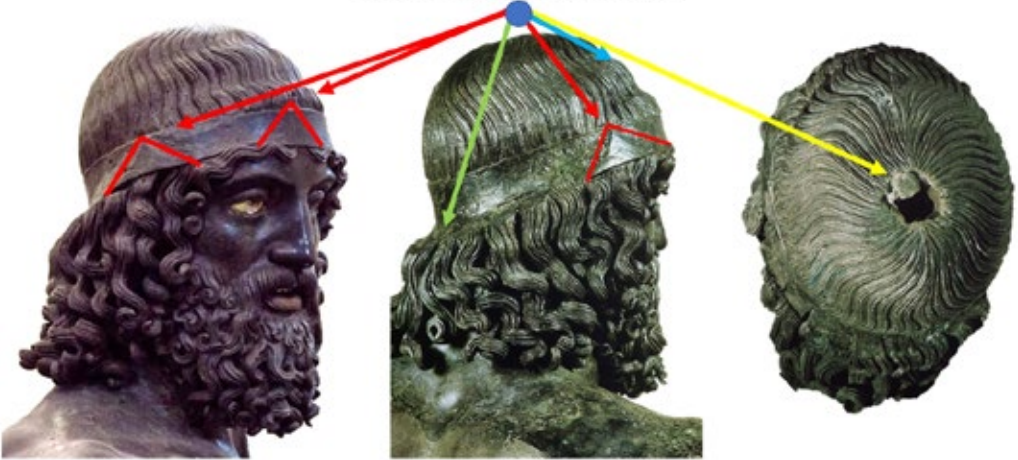
Сведения об авторе. Кастрицио Даниэле — Ph. D., профессор. Университет Мессины, piazza Пульятти, 1, Мессина, 98122, Италия. dcastrizio@unime.it

Аннотация. Недавние анализы материала двух бронзовых статуй из Риаче показали, что они были изготовлены в Аргосе, на Пелопоннесе, в один и тот же период и в одной мастерской. Результаты этих исследований должны быть включены в любое исследование бронз из Риаче.

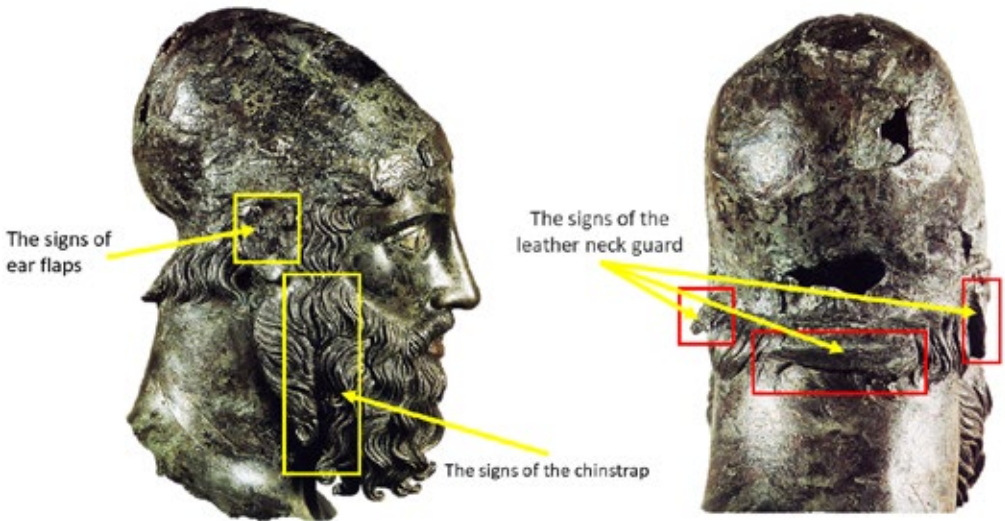
В настоящей статье мы соотносим бронзы со знаменитой группой «братоубийц» (Этеокла и Полиника) работы Пифагора Регийского. В поддержку этого положения мы можем привести еще один памятник: Лилльский папирус. Необычайная удача, что фрагмент Стесихора сохранился до наших дней. Отрывок представляет собой речь матери Этеокла и Полиника, обращенную к сыновьям, которые собираются сойтись в смертельной схватке. Эта сцена может быть соотнесена с позами и другими характеристиками бронз из Риаче. Мы даже можем воспринимать эти статуи как актеров на сцене! Идея этой статуарной группы созвучна современности, но все же принадлежит строгому стилю, первому периоду, в котором греки исполняли произведения искусства, имитирующие реальность.

Ключевые слова: археология Древней Греции; иконография; древнегреческое искусство; бронзы из Риаче; скульптура Древней Греции.

The supports for the Corinthian helmet



III. 5. The supports for the Corinthian helmet of the Bronze A



III. 6. The signs of the presence of the kynê on the Bronze B



III. 7. The Fratricides group made by Pythagoras of Rhegion. Reconstruction by Daniele Castrizio



III. 8. Scopas. Leg of cult statue of Apollo Smintheus. Probably around 350 B.C. Museum, Guelpinar. From: Oezguenel A. C. (ed.). Smintheion. Istanbul, ICDAS, 2015, p. 61



III. 9. AE Coin of Alexandria Troas. Around 300 a. C. The British Museum, Department of Coins. London. From: Oezguenel A. C. (ed.). Smintheion. Istanbul, ICDAS, 2015, p. 95