LETO AND THE CHILDREN

Brunhilde S. Ridgway

Ekrem Akurgal has always been interested in all aspects of Anatolian art and culture; it is hoped that he will enjoy this study which attempts to interpret a well-known sculptural type in the light of Lycian legends.

The type in question is that of a peplophoros in a running pose, holding in her arms, at shoulder level, two children who have been identified as Artemis and Apollo with their mother Leto. Known at first only from depictions on coins and two marble statuettes in Rome (Fig. 1), the composition has now acquired additional importance through the discovery of three over-life size replicas: one in the theater at Miletos (Figs. 2-3), one from Building Q in Pisidian Kremna and another from nearby Seleukia (Figs. 4-5) (2). Although these large copies are headless and fragmentary, only scars or breaks occurring at the shoulders where the children once rested, the appearance of the original can be approximately reconstructed through one of the two statuettes in Rome, in the Torlonia Museum. This piece, too, was severely damaged and has been extensively restored (for instance, all three heads are modern), but the lower bodies of the children remain, and enough of Leto's neck muscles to show that she was looking back while running to her right. A third statuette now provides additional evidence (3). At present on loan to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, California (Figs. 6-7), the piece is, to my knowledge, unrestored, although Artemis' head, which once broke off and was repaired in antiquity, has been reattached. Leto and Apollo are headless, but the children's bodies are almost entirely preserved, showing that the infant Apollo had his arms outstretched in the opposite direction from the flight. His bare upper torso contrasts with that of his sister, who is heavily covered by chiton (?) and himation. We shall return to this statuette later, to determine its relationship to the other replicas. For the moment, let us examine the meaning of the scene.

It has been generally assumed that Leto is depicted while fleeing from Python, the monster sent by jealous Hera to chase her around the world.
To be sure, no depiction of the snake appears on the coins, or even on the funerary altar of Luccia Telesina which is decorated with a vaguely comparable figure in relief; but the latter occurs in the middle of a more complex scene that is open to different interpretations (4), and the coins could give abbreviated forms of a more elaborate bronze monument. Even had the snake not appeared in the original monumental version—it has been argued—the impression of flight created by Leto’s pose, and the presence of the two infants would have sufficed to recall the episode to the viewer’s mind. In addition, it has been suggested that the child Apollo was in the act of shooting Python with his bow, a deed which, on Euripides’ testimony, he is supposed to have performed from his mother’s arms (5).

This interpretation may have been influenced, however indirectly, by the Torlonia replica (Fig. 1), where Apollo has been restored in torsion to his left with arms extended. Yet this pose is now confirmed by the unrestored statuette in California (Figs. 6-7). I believe nonetheless that the total composition conforms neither to the literary accounts nor to the iconography of the shooting of Python as preserved in other ancient monuments.

Only two depictions on vases exist of this event, but both show Leto holding only Apollo in her arms and standing quietly, facing in the same direction as the shooting infant (6). Aside from Euripides’ mention, which does not include Artemis, a similar description is given by Klerachos of Soloi of a bronze statue which stood in Delphi, allegedly on the stone on which Leto stepped when Python, from his cave, attacked her and Apollo performed his deed. In the same passage the goddess is said to have come from Chalkis to Delphi with both twins, but the monument obviously emphasized the role played by the Delphic god and therefore subordinated or entirely removed his sister from the scene (7). A possible Etruscan version of the same episode, acted out by terracotta akroterial figures along the ridgepole of the Portonaccio temple at Veii, shows a tall Leto in forward motion with a small boy on her left arm; fragments of a terracotta snake recovered from the same context suggest that Python was included in the scene (8). It would therefore seem that at least from ca. 500 B.C. onward this version of the killing of Python was known in Greece as well as in Etruria. If, however, both pictorial and literary sources are to be credited, Artemis was not present and Leto was not fleeing.

Several ancient versions are known of the encounter between Apollo and the dragon, and have been conveniently summarized by Fontenrose (9). The one recounted by the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, in which the snake is female and is killed by an already grown god, stands unique. There the motivation seems to be to rid the place of an evil creature, since Apollo is about to establish his oracle there. A second version, attested by Simonides, Apollodorus, Aelian and Ovid, knows a male monster named Python which guards the shrine of Ge or Themis and which Apollo kills to take over the place, using many arrows. The third version, related by Euripides and Klerachos, has already been summarized. Only in the fourth version, given by Lucan, Lucian, Hyginus and commentators, is Python sent by Hera to pursue the pregnant Leto, but the snake then retreats to Delphi, where Apollo goes to avenge his mother. A fifth and last version purports that Python was a human brigand and need not concern us here.

If the actual chase by the monster took place while Leto was pregnant, the statuary type under discussion could not depict that version of the legend. Nor could it show the killing of Python by the child Apollo in a sort of visual synthesis of anachronistic moments, because Artemis would not be included. But another story was told in antiquity about Leto and her wanderings with the new-born twins, and it would seem to fit the sculptural type as preserved.

According to Ovid’s Metamorphoses VI, vv. 317-381, Leto, soon after giving birth to the divine twins on Delos (“puerpera”) and still being pursued by Hera, fled to Lycia where, thirsty and exhausted, she tried to drink the clear waters of a pool. When Lycian peasants prevented her from doing so, the goddess implored them, not only in her name but also in that of her infants who, from her arms, were stretching out their hands in entreat:

“...hi quoque vos moveant, qui nostro brachia tendunt parva sinu,” et casu tendebant brachia nati. (358-359).

When the Lycians persisted in their refusal, threatening her and even muddying the waters of the pond to prevent her from drinking, the irate Leto transformed them into croaking frogs and condemned them to live perpetually in water and slime.

This episode of the Metamorphoses, inserted as it is between the two more famous narrations of Niobe and Marsyas, has received relatively little attention in modern times. As for antiquity, that Ovid himself drew his inspiration from earlier sources can be inferred from an expanded and slightly varied account of the same legend by Antoninus Liberalis, who presumably during the Antonine or Severan period wrote in Greek a Metamorphoseon Synagogé. This work, preserved to us in only one
manuscript (the ninth century A.C. codex Palatinus Heidelbergenensis graecus 398), is in turn based almost exclusively on Hellenistic sources and, in the case of the Lycian episode, on Nikander of Kolophon (the second century B.C. author of Heteroioumena) and on Menenrates of Xanthos (a late fourth century B.C. historical writer of Lykiaia). Antoninus Liberalis states that, after the twins' birth, Leto went from Astera to Lydia, seeking to take her children to the Xanthos river, where she was eventually led by wolves. But she first stopped at the spring Melite on her way, hoping to bathe the babies. Shepherds prevented her, because they were watering their cattle, and Leto left. But she returned to punish the shepherds who had chased her (τας ἀνελίκασαν οὐτάν ἀποκιλήσεις); finding them still at the fountain, she turned them into frogs (10).

Since Ovid's and Antoninus Liberalis's sources seem to have been, if not both Lycian, at least both from Asia Minor, it is likely to assume that they recounted local traditions. Indeed the Lycian connections of Apollo and Leto have often been stressed by modern commentators and go back to the earliest literary mentions of the god: the Iliad and the Homeric Hymn to Apollo (11). The cult of Leto was widespread in Asia Minor, especially at Xanthos, where recent discoveries confirm the antiquity of buildings and offerings at the Letoon (12). If the sculptural type of Leto and the children is in fact to be connected with the Lycian legend of the peasants transformed into frogs, it would be logical to assume that its prototype was created expressly for that area—a theory strengthened by the fact that the only large-scale replicas of the group come from cities at the very borders with Lyca. We should now consider when such a prototype could have been created.

Since the numismatic reproductions are unhelpful for stylistic analysis, only the marble replicas, both in large and small scale, can be profitably studied for chronological purposes. Regrettably, only one of the three statues from Asia Minor has been fully published (the one from Kremna), but the copy from Pisidian Seleukia is known through photographs (Figs.4-5). It differs from all others in that a chiton has been added under Leto's overfolded peplos and is visible at the hem and at the neck opening; in addition, a long lock trailing on the right side of the throat suggests a loose coiffure not present in the other replicas. The Miletos copy (Figs.2-3) makes the apoptygma folds more symmetrical.

The large statue from Kremna and the statuette in the Conservatori echo traits of the Severe style, not only in the flattened running pose but also in the pattern of the folds; the Torlonia statuette, the Miletos and the Seleukia statues have a richer treatment of the costume that is more in keeping with a fourth century date. The new replica in the Getty Museum, although undoubtedly simplified because of its size— it is the smallest of the three statuettes—seems closer to the Kremna figure in the rendering of the kolpos and to the Conservatori one in that of the overfold, but the deep pouch created at the bend of the right knee is reminiscent of Hellenistic formulas, and the costume worn by the little Artemis seems neither Severe nor Classical (13).

Attempts to connect the statuary type with mentions in the literary sources have not been convincing. The bronze monument mentioned by Klearchos of Soloi can only be given a date ante quem of the late fourth century B.C., since Klearchos was a pupil of Aristotle, but could be as early as ca. 500 B.C. on the testimony of the vases. We have already argued, however, that the Delphic group included only Leto and the child Apollo and therefore did not correspond to ours. A statue of Leto by Skopas is described by Strabo (14.1.20) as being in Ephesos, but the goddess is said to be holding a scepter, while the two children are in the arms of Ortygia standing beside her (14). Were we even to assume that the statuary type known to us represents Ortygia rather than Leto herself, it would be difficult to explain the running pose in a context that seems otherwise regal and dignified.

One attribution that has found occasional support is based on a passage of Pliny (NH 34, 77), who saw a bronze "Latona puerpera Apollinem et Dianam infantes sustinens" in the Temple of Concord, made by Euphranor. Several authors have assumed that the goddess was portrayed in a solemn pose, appropriate for a cult image, and have equated the work with representations of Fecunditas on Roman coins (15). This correlation cannot be confirmed, but the Romans' predilection for dedicating within their temples Greek works meaningful in a Latin context would support this interpretation. Concordia, in Imperial times, was especially symbolic of harmony within the royal family, and the concept of political peace was traditionally associated in Roman minds with fruitfulness, both of fields and of men—which witness the Ara Pacis panel.

The connection of our statuary type with Euphranor, though considered attractive, has also been thought unprovable by O. Palagia (16), who has carried out the most thorough recent study of the fourth century master. On the basis solely of the two statuettes in Rome, she would agree, however, that the prototype was probably made in the 370s B.C. Much more hypothetical is the attribution to a late fifth century Praxiteles,
father of Kephisodotos, postulated on the basis of a certain resemblance between the Leto and the Elirene and Ploutos, and of a passage of Pausanias (1.44.2) who in Megara saw statues of Apollo, Artemis and Leto "by Praxiteles" (17). Nothing, however, in the Greek source specifies which Praxiteles, or indicates that the three images were compositionally connected or even that Leto's children were shown as infants. At the other end of the chronological spectrum, J. Inan, in publishing the figure from Kremsn, stressed stylistic similarities with the Running Niobid in Copenhagen and the Demeter Chercel, and therefore advocated a date ca. 450-440 B.C. (18). She rightly underscored the special significance of the Kremsn replica, which at the time of her writing was the only one known at a large scale. She also judiciously stated, however, that it was impossible to derive from the numismatic evidence any indication of the specific city where the original stood, since many provinces of the Roman Empire had copies of the same Greek sculptures and depicted them on their coinage. Her words have proved prophetic in light of her own discovery at Seleukia and the third replica found at Miletos.

The popularity of the motif on Anatolian coins could, however, be taken as indication that the original stood in that general area, if not in any one of the minting cities. If we are correct in assuming that the legend depicted is Leto's encounter with the Lycian peasants, an original location of the monument in Xanthos, perhaps at the Letoon, would be in keeping with the diffusion of the numismatic type. This interpretation of the composition had in fact been considered by F. Wehrli, but he rejected it because some coins from Hierapolis and Tripolis bear the legend Letai Phytha which he interpreted as proof of a Delphic connection. He therefore assumed that the legend of the killing of Python had been imported from Delphi together with the feast (19). Since there is reason to believe, as we have seen, that the iconography of the Delphic episode involved Leto and Apollo alone, the argument can be resumed.

If, however, our sculptural type depicts the Lycian legend, a date for its creation long before the Ovidian poem seems unlikely. Admittedly, Antoninus Liberalis provides sufficient proof that earlier sources for the story existed, but his version is pedestrian and different enough from Ovid's to emphasize, by contrast, the importance of the vivid narrative by the Roman poet. By the same token, both Menekrates and Nikander are relatively too late for the proposed dates of our sculptural group, nor do they seem to have drawn from an existing iconographic tradition. But can a post-Ovidian date be defended on present evidence?

On the basis of four replicas --the two statuettes in Rome and the Kremsn and Seleukia statues-- A. Gulak has already argued that the Leto type should be considered classicistic rather than classical. She compares the goddess with the mid-fifth century B.C. runner in Delphi and finds many common traits; she also notes, however, that the treatment of Leto's apotyigma is not in keeping with the Severe style, and neither is the visibility of her kolpos, given the length of the overfold. The strong bend of her right leg and the pattern of folds at the knee recall the Running Maid of Eleusis, but therefore speak for a date earlier than the 450s. Gulak concludes that the Severe traits of the Leto are "quoted" from disparate sources, as made possible by the much later date of the composition (20).

In basic agreement with this argument, I would add a few observations of my own. The sandals, in the replicas where they are visible, show the Hellenistic contouring of the sole around the toes and the side cylinders which suggest at least a second century B.C. date (21). The Severe style proper in Asia Minor is remarkably under-represented, not only because of the chance of the finds or the political conditions of the early fifth century which prevented much sculptural output, but also because of the innate conservatism of the area, which tended to perpetuate earlier stylistic traits in various forms of "lingerion Archaic." The way of holding the infants virtually at shoulder level, in fact, has been considered an Archaic Ionic trait contrasting with western or mainland Greek representations of kourotophoi, who hold the babies against the chest or in the lap (22). We could therefore assume that the statuary type--under the impetus of Ovid's popularity--was created during the Augustan period or later, at a time when the Severe style had come to stand for antiquity and venerability. The local (?) sculptor who produced the original patterned it after Archaic/Severe models, but--unconsciously?--added more advanced traits inevitably revealing a later date. The type became popular throughout Anatolia because of the strong tradition of worshiping Leto in various forms. How appropriate for private dedications this composition was considered is shown by the Kremsn statue, donated in the late Antonine period by a Lucius Aetius Julianus together with his son Rutilius and his daughter Lucilla.

For all its popularity in Anatolia, the sculptural type seems to have remained primarily limited to that geographical area; Rome knew it only through statuettes, perhaps private commissions of Romans who had seen service in Asia Minor. The Torlonia and Malibu replicas could be third century A.C. in date and only the Conservatorio example may be earlier.
In addition, the centaur of the Leto looks considerably different from the sculptural type under discussion. Since no mention of Leto is epigraphically made on the altar, which is funerary in nature, perhaps the relief should be interpreted along the lines of a Roman legend. A.C.Lucius Telesinus was consul ordinarius in 66; since Lucilia was probably his daughter or sister, her altar should be dated during the Flavian period.

(5) For these suggestions on the interpretation and integration of the group see, e.g., von Steuben in Helbig 6 no. 1501. For Euclid’s statement see Iphig. Taur. vv. 1249-1251 (repeated by Palagia, Euphranor, 36).

(6) These vases are also listed by Palagia, Euphranor, 37, Section I: A) Attic B-f (white) lekythoi, Paris, Cab. Méd. 190, ABV 572, 7; M. Pallottino, Archäol. Z 19 (1953) pl. 37, 1. J. Fontenrose, Python. A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1959) 17, fig. 1. This lekythos has a ‘double’ by the same painter (not included by Palagia), and I therefore list the two vases under a single entry, especially since the second vessel is not as well preserved as the first: Berlin VK 62-115: CVA Norway 1 (1964) pl. 33.3-5; see also the text on p.31 for relevant discussion.

B) Attic B-f lekythoi, Berlin 2212, ARV 750, 8, EAA vol. 4, s.v. Lato, p. 506 fig. 93. I do not include here one more vase, Palagia’s C. Fontenrose, Python, 19 fig. 3: E. Loewy, Ael. 47 (1932) 66 and fig. 18 no. 65. This item is only known through a drawing by W. Schiebel, since it was part of the Hamilton collection and is now lost. Palagia, in consultation with A.D. Trendall, suggests that the vessel was South Italian, probably Apulian perhaps of the first half of the fourth century. Loewy uses it to strengthen his theory on the pictorial origin of certain sculptural compositions (Ibid 47, pp. 47-68, esp. 66-67), and in fact the rocky setting of the scene, at that date, is only conceivable in painting. Details have been either altered or misunderstood in the drawing, since both children appear to have a bare torso, and their arms outstretched toward the snake suggest extraordinary movement. In addition, Apulian artists never have depicted there the ‘drunken snake’ and thereby represent the killing of Python. Yet the snake is shown in his case, that indicating a setting in Delphi and not his chasing of Leto through the world. Admittedly, the running pose of the Leto on the vase makes her almost a mirror image of the sculptural type, but her costume (a peplos belted over the appoggiata) differs and a seaweed mantle has been added (the swan’s wings of the statuary replicas is omitted).

(7) Klearchos of Soli, ap. Athenaios 15, 704e: the passage is cited by Palagia, Euphranor, 37 no. 184, where she accepts the traditional interpretation: although Klearchos specifically stated that Leto was holding only one of her two children, he was probably referring to the story and not to the group at Delphi. A spirited and convincing argument is however made by A. Mahler, RA (supra n. 1) 290-296, who stresses that the Delphic sculpture was meant to codify the legend, it could not have differed from it in this important detail.

(8) Pallottino, Archäol. (supra n. 6) 122-79, made the original identification; see esp. pp. 129-35 and the reconstruction, pl. 38.3. The theory is accepted by M. Sperger and G. Bartoloni, Thè Etrusca, their History, Art and Architecture (New York 1963, English translation of original German/Italian ed. 1977) 115-133. The issue is left open by T. Hadziotiou-Priis, Kurtzrothsche Welt der Statuen der Etrusker (Berlin 1978) 63 n. 7: “Leto or Etruscan Goddess?”, but the attribution is included by Palagia in her listing of surviving works (Euphranor, 38.1), and by K. Schefold, in Die Götterkönige in der klassischen und hellenistischen Kunst (Munich 1931) 42-46, fig. 46.4.

(9) Fontenrose, Python (supra n. 6) 13-22, esp. 21. For additional discussion of the encounter of Apollo and Python and its depiction in the visual arts, see L.G. Kahl, “Apollo et Python,” in Milanges offerts à K. Michaelowski (Warsaw 1966) 481-90.

The lekythos Louvre CA 1915 (white ground b-f) which Kahil presents shows Apollo, appearing relatively grown-up, on a mould probably representing the omphalos, in front of which stands a tripod. Apollo’s opponent is an anguished monster with human head and torso an unusual rendering of Python with affinities to Typhon. Egyptian connections in the story are also explored.

(10) For this account and comments on the author and his sources see M. Papathanomopoulos, Antonius Libon, Leo Mitthammar (Pompeii 1966) no. 35; esp. on p. 146 n. 7. Papathanomopoulos suggests that Am. Lib. fused together two traditions, one about the spring Melite, probably derived from Nikander and changed by Ovid, and the other about the Xanthus river, going back to Menekrates and ignored by
Ovid. That Ovid may have used the same earlier sources is suggested, e.g., by F. Wehrli, in RE suppl. 5 (1931) 2 v. Leto, cols. 570-571 and cf. also M. Wollmann, RE 29 (1910) s.v. Freund, vol. 115, and by K. Metzger, in Metzger et al., FDG 6: Lexicon des Teologen (Paris 1979) 9-10. That the literary accounts may represent an effort to reconcile the cult of Leto with that of the Nymphs, very prominent at the Letoicon at Xanthos, is suggested by A. Balland, FDG 6: Lexicon des Teologen 7. Inscriptions d'epoque Imperiale du Megaron (Paris 1981) 6-18 and p.33-42. Other accounts of the same story are in Prob. ad Virg. Georg. 1.176; Servius ad loc., Myth. Vatic. 1.10,II.45. These last two authors attribute the transformation to Demeter rather than to Leto (Papakomopoulos, p.148 n.1; see also p.xv).

For other comments on Antoninus Liberalis and the writing of metamorphoses in antiquity see J. Renner, "A Papyrus Dictionary of Metamorphoses," HSCP 82 (1978) 277-95, esp. 278 and n.5.

(11) Cf., e.g., B. 4.101, where Apollo is called Lykegenes, although the epithet, like Lykios, has received different translations. For the Homeric Hymn, see esp. v. 179, where the god is said to own Lycos. For a commentary in this sense, F. Czernina, Inti omiserei (Verona 1979), 83-86, and 79-104 on the Hymn to Apollo as a whole (text and translation on pp. 105-51). See also G.M.A. Hanffmann, "On the Gods of Lydian Sardis," in R.M. Anthropomorphus, ed., Beitrage zur Altertumskunde Kleinasiens (Festschrift K. Bittel, Mainz 1983) 219-31, esp. 250-31.

It is unnecessary, in this context, to stress the well-known Anatolian connections of Artemis, and to recall the strong tradition that she was born not in Delos but in Asia Minor (Ortigia) of the literary sources being located, or claimed to be located, near Ephesos. For Leto's cult see Wehrli, RE (supra n.10) cols. 555-58.

(12) A summary of the history of the sanctuary can be found in Metzger et al. (supra n. 10) 9-28.

(13) Gurlas, Nikokastenungen (supra n. 2) 304 n. 389, has noted that in the "western replicas" (the two statues in Rome), Leto's left foot is turned inward, in the direction of the movement, while in the two "eastern replicas" the foot is turned outward. The statue in the Getty Museum seems to represent a position transitional between the two. No traces of the children exist in the three statues from Asia Minor as preserved, although breaks occur at the relevant points on both shoulders. Probably the large scale of the sculptures (and the consequent danger of breakage) demanded that the children be carved separately from the main figure, or even that they be eliminated entirely. That they were present in the original (bronze) group is however attested by the reproductions on coins, and I suspect that they also appeared in the marble replicas despite the present lack of evidence.

(14) For Strabo's passage see A.F. Stewart, Skopas of Paros (Park Ridge 1977) 129 no. 21, see also 111-12. Note how appropriate the presence of Ortigia is for a group in Ephesos, given the city's claim as the birthplace of one twin. In imperial times Ephesos seems to have been embellished with several monuments (of different dates) illustrating mythic tradition and peculiar to that city: cf. the case of the Ikaro/Daidalos myth and perhaps even that of the Amazonomachia: S.B. Ridgeway, Roman Copies of Greek Sculpture. The Problem of the Originals (Ann Arbor 1984) 100.

(15) For this opinion see, e.g., H. von Steuben in Helbig 4, no. 1501. On the Romans' criteria in selecting works for their temples see Ridgeway (supra n. 14) 17-18.

(16) Palagia, Esphramanos, 36-39, especially concluding paragraph.

(17) This theory is by Mahler (supra n. 1 and 7) 290-96.

(18) F. J. Inan (supra n. 2). An even earlier, Severe date is advocated, e.g., by von Steuben in Helbig 4.

(19) F. Wehrli, RE Suppl. 5 (supra n. 10) col. 371.