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Claudius Septimus, Praeclarus Discobolos

DURING THE SECOND CENTURY of our era the Roman world saw a rebirth of Hellenism and of interest in *res Graecae* in many aspects of life, including athletics and athletic festivals.¹ In 1970 the Museum of Art and Archaeology of the University of Missouri acquired a cinerary urn of an athlete which well illustrates this Hellenizing tendency.² This urn, said to have been found in Italy, is made of fine-grained white marble with gray streaks.³ The urn is equipped with a lid of a coarser grained ivory-colored marble which, at first glance, seems not to belong to the vessel. Not only is it of a different type of marble, but it seems not quite to fit the urn. However, there are two rectangular holes in the rim of the lid and two more in the rim of the container which show that the urn was once closed by cramps. There is a vertical crack down one side of the container, running from the rim to the base; this crack must have been made before the urn was buried because there is a circular hole on each side of the crack on the interior, near the rim; these are the remains of an ancient mend. Because there would have been no need of cramps after the urn had been completed and buried, the lid and the container must belong together. The cramps have disappeared, as has the foot, which must have once been joined to the bottom, for there is a circular hole (2.2 cm. deep) in the bottom which undoubtedly was intended for inserting the (hypothetical but necessary) foot. Moreover, both the lid and the container exhibit similar use of the drill.

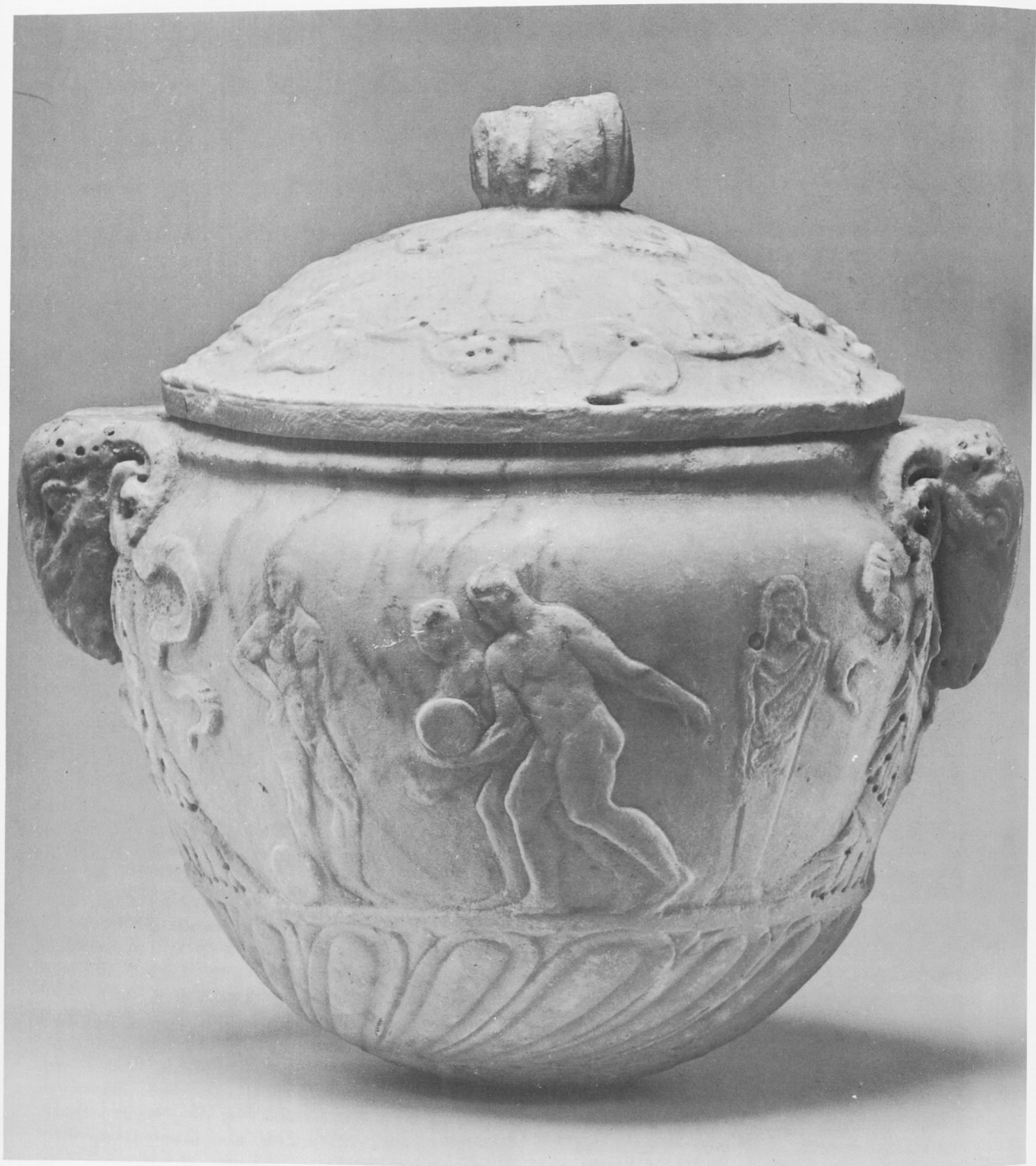
A bud-shaped finial rises from the lid; on the surface of the lid, around the base of the finial, there is a rosette of four large petals alternating with smaller ones; this corresponds exactly to a similar rosette on the base. Around the surface of the lid runs a wreath of leaves

and a few small clusters of grapes; the grapes are separated from one another by drilled holes and there are similar holes at the bases of some of the leaves.

On the upper part of the container are two ram protomes on opposite sides which serve as handles. Their fleece and tear ducts are indicated by drilled holes. Their horns merge gradually and naturally into the surface of the container. Two drilled laurel festoons in relief hang between the horns of the protomes, each touching the frieze at the bottom. A fillet binds each festoon, its two ends hanging serpent-fashion on both sides of the four festoon segments.

On one face of the urn there is an inscription within a raised frame. On each side of the frame crouches a winged griffin whose hind legs are partially covered by the festoons. A winged genius in low relief, holding a palm branch, emerges from behind each griffin at the point where the wings and necks meet. On the other face of the urn there is a gymnasium scene, in the center of which are two nude male figures in relief, one overlapping the other. The nearer figure is holding a discus, while the farther figure has apparently just released the one which is on the ground. On the left, another nude male is standing at rest, with his right hand on his hip. A discus stands on edge in front of his right foot. A bearded herm in low relief stands on the right of the scene, between the figures and the nearest fillet; he is apparently dressed and veiled.

A narrow relief band divides the gymnasium scene from the decoration below and represents the ground line. Beneath this is an oblique tongue decoration in relief. Between each tongue appears the top of a sharp dart. A petal rosette, similar to the one on the lid, encircles the base.



Opposite page: marble urn with lid, side showing a gymnasium scene with discus throwers. Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Left: lid of the urn seen from above, showing holes for attachment to the vessel.

Below, left: one of the two ram's heads, showing the fillets below.

Below: bottom of the urn, with petal rosette.



THE INSCRIPTION within the frame is particularly interesting.

D M
CLAUDIUS SEPTIMUS. XXV
PRAECLARUS DISCOBOLOS.
MULTORUM CERTAMINUM
VICTOR. CARUS ACCEPTU
SQUE IMPERATORI. SUE
MEMORIAE FAUSTA
USOR DILECTA HANC
URNAM FECIT.

The full reading is: "*D(is) M(anibus) / Claudius Septimus (vixit annis) XXV, / praeclarus discobolos, / multorum certaminum / victor. Carus acceptu- / sque imperatori. Su(a)e / memoriae Fausta / usor (=uxor) dilecta hanc / urnam fecit.*"

Translated, this reads: "*To the deified shades. Claudius Septimus lived twenty-five years, a famous discus-thrower, winner of many contests. Dear and agreeable to the emperor. Fausta, his beloved wife, had this urn made for his memory.*"

Although numerous athletes are known to us from inscriptions,⁴ Claudius Septimus is the only discobolos with either a Greek or a Latin epitaph. The formula *Dis Manibus* began to be used in the age of Augustus, and was used increasingly throughout the first century A.D., becoming more and more common by the end of the century; in the second century its use was widespread,⁵ so much so that the eminent epigrapher Degrassi could establish it almost as a rule that an inscription headed by *Dis Manibus* is probably from the second century.⁶ However, there are regional as well as chronological variations in the use of epigraphic formulas.⁷ In Spain, at Merida, *Dis Manibus Sacrum* is found sixty-eight times, while *Dis Manibus* is found only twice; from Tarragona there are ninety examples of *Dis Manibus* but only five or six of *Dis Manibus Sacrum*; and at Barcino, *Dis Manibus* is found on forty-one inscriptions while *Dis Manibus Sacrum* does not appear at all.⁸ A different picture is presented by Hatt's study of Gallo-Roman funerary monuments from Comminges and Couserans in southwest France; there, *Hic Situs Est* was used throughout the first century A.D.; the dative case of the name of the deceased without an introductory formula was used in the late first and early sec-

ond centuries, while *Dis Manibus* became common only from the middle of the second century.⁹ However, the evidence for Italy would seem to indicate that a second-century date is more likely,¹⁰ if our urn does indeed come from Italy. The use of the nominative case for the name of the deceased after *Dis Manibus* is apparently more common in other parts of the empire,¹¹ but still there are numerous examples from Italy.¹²

There is nothing particularly striking about the discobolos' name. That he lacks a *praenomen* is an additional indication that we are dealing with a second-century inscription,¹³ which makes it unlikely that he has anything to do with the Julio-Claudians (except perhaps as a descendant of a Claudian freedman) or with Nero's games in spite of his *nomen*, Claudius. A charioteer named Claudius Olympus is known from an inscription dated to "after A.D. 110, perhaps about 120," an inscription which has letter forms very similar to those of the present epitaph.¹⁴ The use of the Greek nominative, discobolos, and the minor grammatical infelicity, *sue* for *eius*, may point to a Greek milieu. *Sue* for *suae* and *usor* for *uxor* may point in the same direction, although these latter errors are quite common.¹⁵ The use of the word *urna* is very rare; the only examples (two) in Dessau's standard collection of inscriptions are in poetic epitaphs.¹⁶ Other indications of a later rather than an earlier date are the adjective *praeclarus* and the phrase *acceptus imperatori*. As Gardiner notes,¹⁷ the inscriptions of athletes in the second century reveal "a world of professionalism, of self advertisement, and of records." The best parallels to our epitaph come from inscriptions honoring pantomimists in the late second century;¹⁸ Claudius Septimus, whose laudation is modest by comparison, evidently lived when the glorification of athletes and entertainers was just beginning.

The most troublesome aspect of the inscription is the punctuation. Almost all Latin inscriptions with *interpuncta* locate the points above the line rather than on it. Dr. E. O. Wingo, whose dissertation¹⁹ is the standard work on the subject, has provided me with two examples of inscriptions with the punctuation



Marble urn, side with inscription, a dedication to the deceased by his wife.

on the line,²⁰ and I have found one other, one which has the punctuation throughout the inscription (as on our urn). But this inscription presents problems because two editors have called it false, one citing as his first reason precisely the punctuation. The inscription in question is *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 3. 224*, which is, unfortunately, published in the *CIL* with only one punctuation mark—and that is in the wrong place (above the line). Happily, it has also been published with a photograph.²¹ The text reads as follows:

L(ucia) Flora. Fab(ia). coniunx. optima/pietate. castitate. incomparabilis/cunctis. sed. melius. diis. placuit/vix(it). an(nis). XVII. m(ensibus). II. d(iebus). IV. maritus/cui. snp. deca. f. Ruff. f. mar. q(uaestor). r. pr(aefectus)/ripae Dan[ub]ii II. vir. l co(loniae) Breg(etionis) carae/

f. s. memoria.

Desjardins considers this inscription to be false for the following reasons:

"1) parceque les points séparatifs sont gravés au bas des lignes au lieu de l'être au milieu;

"2) parceque Flora a un prénom, lorsque les femmes n'en portent jamais et que Fabia est, ou un nomen gentilicium, et non un cognomen; ou bien exprime l'inscription dans la tribu (Fabia), ce qui n'a jamais lieu pour les femmes;

"3) parceque la formule et l'idée qu'elle renferme à la 3^e ligne est toute moderne;

"4) parceque les sigles de la 5^e ligne sont intelligibles ou impossibles;

"5) parceque la charge de praefectus ripae Danubii n'existe pas; etc., etc."²²

As we have seen, there are authentic inscriptions with the punctuation on the line. *Praenomina* for women are indeed rare, but they are found in the Empire; Cagnat²³ gives three examples, one of which is L(ucia) Antistia Saturnina (*CIL* 8. 3869). Flora is certainly suspect as a nomen, but it could easily be an error for Floria, a fairly common name.²⁴ Nor is Fabia a total impossibility, as witness Aur(elius) Fabius (*CIL* 3. 847) and Cassia quondam Fabia (*CIL* 3. 11052: Brigetio). Desjardins' third and fourth objections are as frivolous²⁵ as Mommsen's notion that Bregetio could not have been

written for Brigetio.²⁶ It is true that there was no post entitled *praefectus ripae Danuvii*; but there stands on record both the title praef(ectus) ripae Danuvii et civitatum duar(um) Boior(um) et Azalior(um) (*CIL* 9. 5363) and praefectus ripae (*sc.* Danuvii) (*Not. Dig., Or.* xxxix. 30f., 33-35; xl. 31f., 34f.). There is no reason why, on a private inscription, of an evidently late date, the husband's office could not have been called, *tout court*, praefectus ripae Danuvii. Hence, *CIL* 3. 224* is probably authentic and provides a good parallel for the punctuation of Claudius Septimus' urn. As Dr. Wingo has pointed out to me in a letter (of October 12, 1973): "I do not see this manner of placing the point as a sufficient reason to question the authenticity of the urn or the inscription. Perhaps it would be a reasonable assumption that a prospective forger would attempt to avoid suspicions by using the regular interpuncta."

AN OVOID SHAPE for cinerary urns is well attested in the Roman period,²⁷ notably in the first century A. D.,²⁸ but also later in more elaborate and highly developed form.²⁹ Our urn fits well into this developing tradition of increasing elaboration, but with a very strong Hellenizing influence which would seem to locate it to about the Hadrianic period. The festoon with fillets and rams' heads, although Hellenistic,³⁰ had penetrated into Roman art early in the first century B.C.³¹ Other elements, like the festoons once symbolic but now chiefly decorative,³² derive from Greek art and are common on urns and monuments of the late first and early second centuries A.D.: griffins,³³ buds,³⁴ winged geniuses,³⁵ palm branches,³⁶ vines.³⁷ The combination of tongue decoration, protomes as handles, buds as finials, rams' heads and festoons on one urn finds parallels during the same period.³⁸ Because discus throwing was a Greek skill, the central feature of the face of the urn with the relief, the gymnasium scene, is purely Greek in inspiration. As is almost inevitable for any artist dealing with an athletic theme, both the two central figures and the figure on the left are ultimately Polykleitan in inspiration; the artist tried, without conspicuous

success, to reproduce the rhythmic *contrapposto* of Polydeitus. The figure of the herm, schematic though it is, is clear enough and serves definitely to locate the action in a gymnasium.³⁹

But it is likewise clear that action such as is shown here is not intended to represent the principal activity of a discobolos. We are tolerably well informed about the ancient mode of throwing a discus. Several actual discuses have survived,⁴⁰ and discus throwers in various poses are well represented in art.⁴¹ Gardiner⁴² and Pernice⁴³ especially have analyzed this evidence. Although it is emphasized that there are many possible individual variations in the method of throwing a discus, there are still certain fundamental laws of physics which must be obeyed; one cannot throw a discus while resting it on one's wrist and forearm, as the figure on our urn is doing. Even if the figure were holding the discus properly, his body is in the wrong position to throw the discus; he can only

roll it, which is the action that the farther figure seems to have just concluded. Rather than charge the artist with ignorance or incompetence, we may perhaps assume that he was schematically or impressionistically portraying the action of a discobolos⁴⁴ and was not concerned with reproducing an actual or classical pose.

In fine, everything indicates that the urn is the product of a Hellenizing milieu in the late first or early second century A.D., more likely the latter than the former. The identity of the emperor to whom Claudius Septimus was *carus* and *acceptus* seems incontrovertible. Who else but the Greekling, Hadrian, in whose villa at Tivoli was found a copy of Myron's *Discobolos*?⁴⁵

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¹E. N. Gardiner, *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals* (London 1910) 176.

²Acc. No. 70.79. This urn was studied as a class project in 1971 by Mr. Luca Fedeli, then a graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia; he later showed photographs of the urn to Professor Enrico Paribeni, who thought that while the urn itself is ancient, the figurative and decorative parts are modern forgeries. However, subsequent examination of the urn itself under black light shows no modern re-cutting of the surface, and that therefore the urn may be considered entirely ancient. I am most grateful to Mr. Fedeli for information on matters of art and style.

³Total height 28.5 cm., container 19 cm., lid 9.5 cm.; diameter at the rim 20 cm., at the base 5 cm. The depth of the hollow for the ashes is 13.5 cm. The framed inscription is 12 cm. wide, 9 cm. high; the letters of the text are 5 mm. high, those above (*DM*) 8 cm. high.

⁴See the collection made by L. Moretti, *Iscrizioni agonistiche Greche* (Rome 1953).

⁵W. Schwartzlose, *De Titulis sepulcralibus Latinis Quaestionum Capita quatuor* (Halle 1913) 4-7, 18f.

⁶A. Degrassi, *Scritti vari di antichità* (Rome 1962) Vol. 1, 659; cf. J. H. D'Arms, "Eighteen Latin Inscriptions from Puteoli," *A.J.A.* 72 (1973) 155.

⁷R. Cagnat, *Cours d'épigraphie latine*, 4th ed. (Paris 1914) 279-283, especially 281, n. 12.

⁸J. Vives Gatell, "Características regionales de los formularios epigráficos romanos," *Actas del I congreso español de estudios clásicos* (Madrid 1958) 485-492.

⁹J. -J. Hatt, "Les monuments funéraires gallo-romaines du

Comminges et du Couserans," *Annales du Midi* 54/55 (1942/43) 169-254.

¹⁰H. Thylander, *Étude sur l'épigraphie latine* (Lund 1952) 51f.

¹¹Schwartzlose, *op. cit.*, 24.

¹²E.g., G. Milisani, "Iscrizioni latine inedite di Roma in proprietà privata," *Epigraphica* 34 (1972) 91: *D. M. / Aurelius April(is) mil(es) coh(ortis) I pr(aetoria) p(iae) v(indicis)*, etc.; and 102: *D. M. / Iunia Zosime/vix(it) ann(is) XXVII/ men(sibus) II*.

¹³Thylander, *op. cit.*, 77-81.

¹⁴*CIL* 6. 37034, also in A. E. Gordon, *Album of Dated Latin Inscriptions*, Vol. 2 (Berkeley 1964) no. 173A; pl.76.

¹⁵Cf. *CIL* 10. 270, 4113, 7692 (*visit for vixit*), 2079 (*bisit*); 2244, 5654, 6332, 6876, 8259 (*e for ae*).

¹⁶H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, Vol. 2, part 1 (Berlin 1902) no. 6801/2; 2, part 2 (1906) no. 7726.

¹⁷*Op. cit.*, 178-182. See also R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana 1942) 268, 270, 273f., 288.

¹⁸*CIL* 14. 2113: *M. Aurel. Aug. lib. Agilo Septentrioni, pantomimo sui temporis primo...producto ab imp. M. Aurel. Commodo...*; cf. 14. 2977, 4254; *AE*, 1915, 55; 1956, 122 (from J. Bayet, "Les vertus du pantomime Vincentius," *Libyca* 3 [1955] 103-121); *CIL* 5. 5889, 14. 4624; M. Sordi, "L'epigrafe di un pantomimo recentemente scoperta a Roma," *Epigraphica* 15 (1953) 104-121; J. P. Morel, "Pantomimus allectus inter iuvenes," *Hommages...M. Renard* (Brussels 1969) Vol. 2, 525-535.

¹⁹*Latin Punctuation in the Classical Age* (University of Illinois 1963).

²⁰*Eph. Epig.* 2. 317, also in *CIL* 2. 5492; *CIL* 3. 352.

- ²¹*Monuments épigraphiques du Musée national hongrois dessinés et expliqués par E. Desjardins* (Budapest 1873); text on p. 125, photograph on plate 37D.
- ²²Mommsen's comment in *CIL*, *ad loc.*, is "Suspecta est et propter formam litterarum et propter nomina vix Romana et propter Bregetionis formam pro vera Brigetionis et propter praefecti ripae Danuvii plane inauditum munus."
- ²³*Op. cit.*, 47f.
- ²⁴*CIL* 3. 839, 1194, 1923, 8532, 8534, 13899.
- ²⁵*Dis melius placitum* is merely a restatement of Vergil, *Aen.* 2. 428: *dis aliter visum*; see also Horace, *Sat.* 2. 6. 22; Lucan, 10. 417; Val. Flacc. 3. 296. For errors on authentic inscriptions, it will suffice to cite *CIL* 10. 7916: *Torquato Le/ m. ac Honorio/ flaminii d/ govint/ fcuasuiu/ sarim/ isii- mac/ voreorm/ ovi*. For attempts to explain how certain types of errors came about, see the series of articles by J. Mallon, *Museum Helveticum* 10 (1953) 141-160; *Libyca* 2 (1954) 187-199; 455-459; 3 (1955) 307-327; *Scriptorium* 11 (1957) 177-194; *Libyca* 7 (1959) 111-120; *CRAI* 1955, 126-136; cf. also J. Mallon, *Paléographie romaine* (Madrid 1952).
- ²⁶See *CIL* 3. 10533: *D. M. Iul. Laetillae. Marc. Aur. Thae- genes dec. M. Bregetionesium coniugi carissime faciendum curavit*; 11342, a milestone which records the miles a *Breg(eti)one*.
- ²⁷W. Altmann, *Die roemischen Grabaltaere der Kaiserzeit* (Berlin 1905) 47, fig. 34f.; cf. J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Ithaca 1971) 255; G. Lippold, *Die Skulpturen des vatikanischen Museums* (Berlin 1956) 3. 2. 378-379, no. 10 (pl. 163).
- ²⁸L. Budde and R. Nicholls, *A Catalogue of Greek and Roman Sculpture in the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge* (Cambridge 1964) 93, no. 150 (pl. 50).
- ²⁹G. Lippold, *op. cit.*, 3. 2. 176f. 30 (pl. 84); 211. 74 (pl. 99); 273. 1 (pl. 126); 367. 112 (pl. 157); D. Mustilli, *Il Museo Mussolini* (Rome 1939) 44, no. 26 (pl. 26, 89). For the influence of ceramics and toreutics, see P. Hauser, *Die neu-attischen Reliefs* (Stuttgart 1889) 121-130.
- ³⁰E. Strong, *Roman Sculpture from Augustus to Constantine* (London 1907) 64f.; P. Ducati, "Bucrani e Festoni," *Scritti in onore di B. Nogara* (Vatican City 1937) 169-171.
- ³¹H. Delbrueck, *Hellenistische Bauten in Latium* (Leipzig 1928) 16ff., 88.
- ³²See J. Charbonneaux, *L'Art au siècle d'Auguste* (Paris 1948) 96. For the clients of urn makers, see Altmann, *op. cit.*, 23; Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 253-268. For the symbolism of the festoon, see E. Strong, *Apotheosis and After Life* (London 1915) 186; F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Paris 1942) 245, 297, 317f., 458. See also Altmann, 59-67; Mustilli, *op. cit.*, 46, no. 34 (pl. 130, 114); 155, no. 18 (pl. 97, 365).
- ³³Altmann, *op. cit.*, 229; M. Collignon, *Statues funéraires* (Paris 1911) 83-92.
- ³⁴Strong, *op. cit.* (n. 32), 169.
- ³⁵Cumont, *op. cit.*, 115, n. 1, 219f., 239, 395. For urns with winged geniuses flanking the inscription frame (parallel to our griffins) see Mustilli, *op. cit.*, 41. 17 (pl. 30, 116), 42. 21 (pl. 130, 117), 45f., 32 (pl. 130, 120).
- ³⁶Cumont, *op. cit.*, 115, n. 1; 469, n. 2; 481, n. 3; 219; 220, n. 5; 239, n. 2; 429, 481f.
- ³⁷Strong, *op. cit.* (n. 32), 199f.; Cumont, *op. cit.*, 373, 491.
- ³⁸Mustilli, *op. cit.*, 44. 26 (pl. 26, 89).
- ³⁹Cumont, *op. cit.*, pl. 46, 2, representing "Luttes d'enfants dans la palestre," includes a discobolos with a herm on the extreme left. Cumont discusses this scene on p. 469f. Among the numerous representations of gymnasium scenes with herms, see, e.g., C. Bluemel, *Sport der Hellenen* (Berlin 1936) nos. 72, 96, 111.
- ⁴⁰E. N. Gardiner, *Athletics of the Ancient World* (Oxford 1930) 115, with figs. 111-113; J. Juethner, *Die athletischen Leibesuebungen der Griechen* (Oesterreich. Ak. der Wissensch., Phil.-Hist. Kl. 249. 2, Vienna 1968) 233-242.
- ⁴¹Some of the more accessible reproductions are to be found in H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca 1972); J. H. Krause, *Die Gymnastik und Agonistik der Hellenen* (Wiesbaden 1971, reprint); J. Juethner, *op. cit.*; H. A. Harris, *Greek Athletes and Athletics* (London 1964); C. Bluemel, *op. cit.*; Gardiner, *op. cit.* (n. 1, 40); B. Schroeder, *Der Sport im Altertum* (Berlin 1927).
- ⁴²E. N. Gardiner, "Throwing the Diskos," *J.H.S.* 27 (1907) 1-36.
- ⁴³E. Pernice, "Zum Diskoswurf," *Jahrbuch des kaiserlich deutschen archaeologischen Instituts* 23 (1908) 94-100. The works cited in n. 41 also provide analyses. W. W. Hyde, *Olympic Victor Monuments and Greek Athletic Art* (Washington 1921) provides, on pp. 219-222, a summary of the requisite movements and depictions of them.
- ⁴⁴Gardiner, *Athletics...*, 160.
- ⁴⁵For Myron's *Discobolos*, see Hyde, *op. cit.*, 183-187; fig. 35 is the copy from Hadrian's villa (cf. p. 185, n. 1). For Hadrian's Hellenism, see H. Bengtson, *Griechische Geschichte* (Munich 1950) 507-510; A. S. Benjamin, "The Altars of Hadrian in Athens and Hadrian's Panhellenic Program," *Hesperia* 32 (1963) 57-86.