

Article

Tenacious Tendrils: Replicating Nature in South Italian Vase Painting

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Abstract: Elaborate floral tendrils are one of the most distinctive iconographic features of South Italian vase painting, the red-figure wares produced by Greek settlers in Magna Graecia and Sicily between ca. 440–300 B.C. They were a particular specialty of Apulian artisans and were later adopted by painters living in Paestum and Etruria. This lush vegetation is a stark contrast to the relatively meager interest of Archaic and Classical Athenian vase painters in mimetically depicting elements of the natural world. First appearing in the work of the Iliupersis Painter around 370 B.C., similar flowering vines appear in other contemporary media ranging from gold jewelry to pebble mosaics, perhaps influenced by the career of Pausias of Sicyon, who is credited in ancient sources with developing the art of flower painting. Through analysis of the types of flora depicted and the figures that inhabit these lush vegetal designs, this paper explores the blossoming tendrils on South Italian vases as an evocation of nature’s regenerative powers in the eschatological beliefs of peoples, Greek and Italic alike, occupying southern Italy.

Keywords: South Italian; vase painting; Apulian; floral; eschatology

1. Introduction

Flora first appeared on painted Greek ceramics during the Bronze Age, when it served as the vase’s primary decoration, exemplified by Kamares Ware and Late Minoan Floral Style vase painting. An interest in vegetal-inspired themes arose again during the 7th century B.C., inspired by contacts with the visual culture of the Near East and Egypt, but its function had shifted to a secondary role, often serving as fill or ornament around figures that became the primary decorative focus (e.g., rosettes; Cook 1997, pp. 42–43; Boardman 2001, p. 32). This trend continued into the black-figure and red-figure vase painting of the Archaic and Classical periods when stylized floral ornaments, such as palmettes, palmette-lotus chains, ivy, laurel leaves with berries, and lotus buds, could frame a figural panel as well as decorate subsidiary areas of the vase, such as on the neck or under the handles.¹ Occasionally Greek vase painters of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. included vegetation in their figural scenes, such as trees and bushes, to indicate a natural landscape, but despite their interest in rendering details of human anatomy, there was little interest in similar exactitude when depicting the natural world.²

Stylistically quite different from the plant-based motifs used by the vase-painters of the Aegean and Greek mainland are the elaborate blossoming tendrils often emerging from an acanthus calyx that were a specialty of artisans in the region of Apulia (corresponding to the “heel” of the Italian peninsula)

¹ The most extensive discussion of the use of vegetal ornament in Greek vase painting, with a particular focus on Attic vases, is (Jacobsthal 1927, especially pp. 159–98).

² Certain Attic black-figure vase painters like Exekias, however, did put greater emphasis upon indicating natural landscapes through their inclusion of animals, trees, bushes, mounds of earth, and rocks, yet there is little naturalism in their rendering (Nelson 1977, pp. 14–19, 27–31; Hurwit 1991, pp. 40–55; Holmberg 1992). Floral motifs, however, do appear in other media in Athens, namely akroteria and anthemnia grave stele starting in the third quarter of the 5th century B.C.

(Figure 1). Such floral designs occur on over 1000 pieces in the catalogs of Apulian vases assembled by Arthur Dale Trendall and Alexander Cambitoglou.³ This motif is part of a larger phenomenon found in the red-figure pottery workshops of the Greek settlements of Magna Graecia and Sicily, which were repeatedly inspired by their ecological surroundings, from the speckled and sinuous rocks on Campanian vases that appear to represent forms of igneous breccia and cooled lava flows, respectively⁴, both geological features of the region's volcanically active landscape (Trendall 1967, p. 227), to the wide range of recognizable species of sea life found on the fish plates made in Apulia, Campania, and Paestum (McPhee and Trendall 1987, 1990; Kunisch 1989; Donati and Pasini 1997). The lush flora on Apulian vase is remarkable not only for its detail, but because it is populated with a variety of figures, unlike other vegetal decoration and ornament in earlier Greek vase-painting. Close study of the motif's use, including the personages that inhabit these tendrils and the other imagery paired with them, reveals that this lush flora was intended as an evocation of nature's regenerative powers and the eschatological beliefs of peoples, Greek and Italic alike, occupying Magna Graecia.

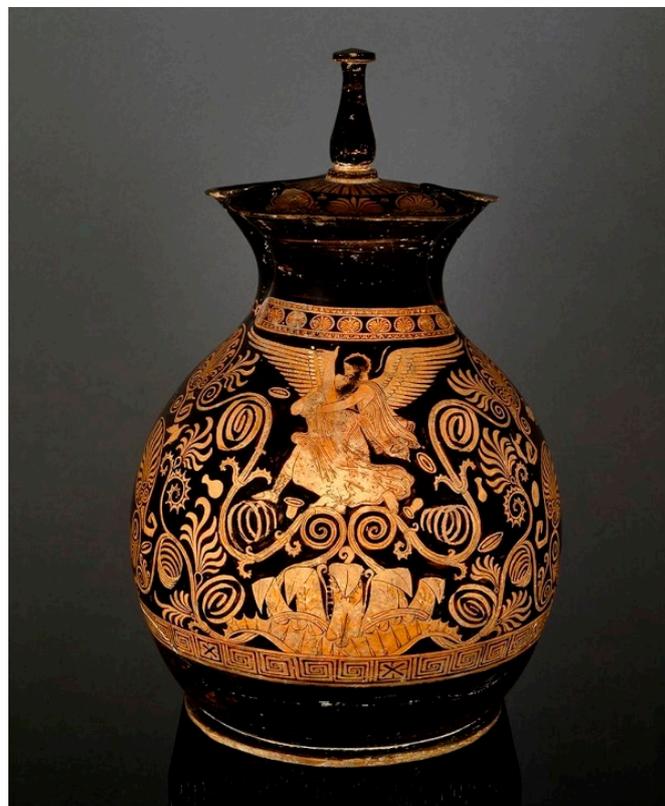


Figure 1. Paris, Louvre K 35 Apulian chous, Salting Painter, ca. 360 B.C. Boreas and Oreithyia among floral tendrils emerging from an acanthus calyx. Image © RMN, Hervé Lewandowski.

³ Floral tendrils appear on a total of 1071 Apulian vases published in (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 1982, 1983, 1991–1992). Other similar pieces with the motif have continuously come to light since the early 1990s on the art market as well as in controlled excavations. For the purpose of this study, however, Trendall and Cambitoglou's work has been used as a broad sample pool.

⁴ For examples of the spotted breccia, see the rock to which Andromeda is chained on the hydria Berlin inv. 3238 (Trendall 1967, p. 227, no. 8, pl. 89, 1–3) and the vases of the Spotted Rock Group (ibid., pp. 234–45; Trendall 1973, pp. 189–90; Trendall 1983, pp. 120–21). For a lava flow, see Adolphseck, Schloß Fasenerie 164 (Trendall 1967, p. 312, no. 619, pl. 123, 6) by the Caivano Painter.

2. A Phenomenon Blossoms

Floral tendrils first appear as secondary decoration on the necks of volute-kraters attributed to the Iliupersis Painter, dated to ca. 370–360 B.C.⁵ It is on this shape that the motif was most frequently painted⁶ (Figure 2). Within a generation, flowering vines occur on the necks, shoulders, and a narrow band around the belly of other large shapes—amphorae⁷, loutrophoroi⁸, and hydriai⁹ (Figures 3 and 4). The motif became a primary decorative element around 360–350 B.C., concentrated at first in the work of the Salting Painter, the Painter of the Dublin Situla, and their associates. Perhaps a forerunner is the Salting Painter’s pelike in London, which features an embracing couple, likely Dionysos and Ariadne, on a couch, below which are sumptuous floral tendrils rising from an acanthus calyx and spreading out laterally to either side.¹⁰ Soon after, the floral décor took over nearly the entire surface of the vase, becoming a setting for the primary figural decoration on small-scale shapes including pelikai (jars)¹¹ and situlae (wine buckets)¹² (Figure 5). On certain small shapes, particularly alabastra¹³, squat lekythoi¹⁴, and bottles¹⁵, the floral décor may well have referred to the scent of the perfumed oil possibly contained in them.¹⁶ No clear differentiation between the types of flowers painted on large and small vases is apparent.

⁵ E.g., London, British Museum F 277 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 8/5, p. 193); Boston 1970.235 (ibid., 8/11, p. 194); and St. Petersburg 567 = St. 878 (ibid., 8/12, p. 194).

⁶ Within the sample pool, 596 volute-kraters feature floral tendrils.

⁷ Such as on the shoulders of Taranto 8935 from Canosa (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 13/4, p. 338) and London, British Museum F 331 (ibid., 13/5, p. 338), both attributed to the Varrese Painter, ca. 360–350 B.C. The amphora is the second most frequent shape on which flowering vines appear, occurring on 166 examples in Trendall and Cambitoglou’s publications.

⁸ For example, the in the central band on the body of Naples 3242 attributed to the Group of Ruvo 423 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/44, p. 404) and on the shoulders of Berlin F 3239 and F 3240 by the Darius Painter (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/22 and 18/23, p. 490). The motif occurs on 75 loutrophoroi and 48 barrel-amphorae within the sample pool.

⁹ See the band around the belly of Naples Stg. 37 by the Varrese Painter (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 13/30, p. 342). Floral tendrils are painted on 14 pieces in the sample pool.

¹⁰ London, V&A 2493.1910 (ibid., 15/6, p. 396, pl. 137, 5–6).

¹¹ E.g., Kassel T. 561 (ibid., 16/78, p. 430); CVA Kassel 2 pls. 77 and 78, 1–2) and Louvre K 100 (ibid., 16/80, p. 430), both related in style to the Chini Painter. A total of 16 pelikai with the motif are in Trendall and Cambitoglou’s catalogs. Other small shapes on which the floral tendrils repeatedly occur are oinochoai (24 examples), kantharoi (22 pieces), and mugs (10 examples).

¹² For example, Ruvo 1372 (ibid., 15/36, p. 402) and Dublin 1880.1106 (ibid., 15/37, p. 402, pl. 142, 1–2) by the Painter of the Dublin Situla. The motif occurs on only four situlae, and it appears with the same frequency on kylikes, pyxides, lekythoi, and askoi.

¹³ Such as on Munster 678 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 21/11, p. 606, pl. 232, 2) and Lecce 719 (ibid., 21/19, p. 606; CVA Lecce 2 IV Dr pl. 46, 6–8), both attributed to the Alabastra Group. A total of 22 alabastra decorated with floral tendrils are in the sample pool.

¹⁴ As on Cambridge, Fogg Art Museum 1972.235 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 21/33, p. 608) and Taranto 117116 (ibid., 21/40, p. 608). Ten squat lekythoi with the motif are found in Trendall and Cambitoglou’s publications.

¹⁵ The only two bottles in the sample pool are Karlsruhe B 43 (ibid., 21/31, p. 608; CVA Karlsruhe pl. 71, 1) and Metaponto 27545 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 21/32, p. 608, pl. 233, 6).

¹⁶ For an overview of perfume manufacturing and distribution in the Classical world, see (Reger 2005).



Figure 2. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 1970.235 Apulian volute-krater, Iliupersis Painter, ca. 365–355 B.C. Female head in floral surround (neck), group of two youths and three women assembled in a garden in the presence of Eros (body). Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 3. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 86.AE.680 Apulian loutrophoros, Painter of MNB 1148, ca. 330 B.C. Siren in floral surround (neck), Zeus and Leda (body). Digital image courtesy of the Getty Open Content Program.



Figure 4. Basel, Antikenmuseum S 21 Apulian loutrophoros, Laodamia Painter, ca. 360–350 B.C. Eros moving to left in floral setting (neck), red-figure female head in floral setting (shoulder), death of Alcestis (upper band on body), frontal female head in added white in floral surround (central band on body), woman seated on klismos with two women on either side (lower band on body). Photograph © Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig.

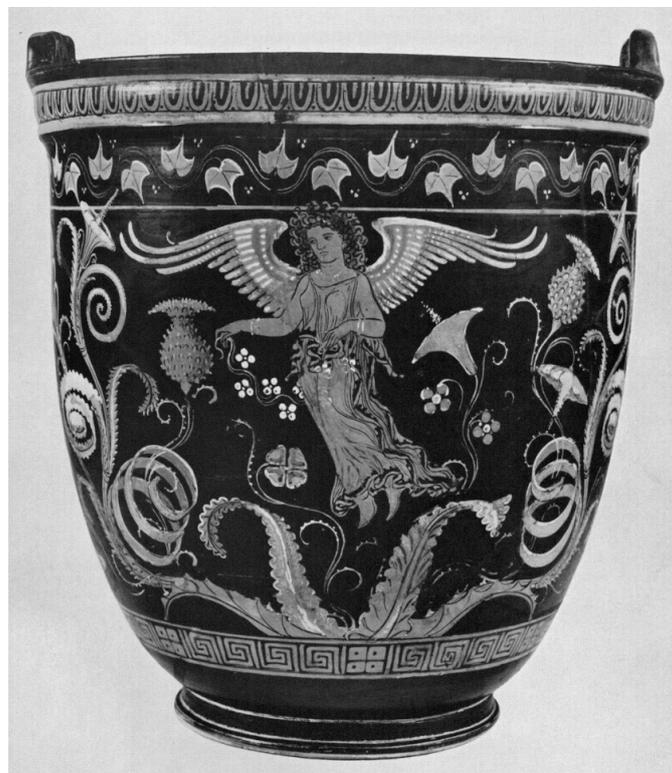


Figure 5. Ruvo, Museo Nazionale Jatta 1372 Apulian situla, Painter of the Dublin Situla, ca. 360–350 B.C. Nike amid flowering tendrils above an acanthus calyx. Photograph provided by the Ministero per i Beni Culturali, Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Puglia, Archivio fotografico, Taranto.

The use of flowering tendrils continued to follow these two patterns—as secondary decoration on monumental shapes and as part of the primary decoration on small vases—until the early third century B.C., when Apulian red-figure vase production ceased. The motif spread elsewhere within Italy, but it never enjoyed the same popularity as it did in the region of Apulia. It occasionally occurs in the vase-painting of Campania¹⁷, from where the Etruscans, who colonized the region alongside the Greeks, likely borrowed the motif for their own painted wares¹⁸ (Figure 6). The Apulian penchant for floral vines also revealed the origins of the Aphrodite Painter, whose name vase, uncovered in a Paestan tomb in 1967, features the goddess in a translucent garment holding a tympanon and standing on a thistle flower in the presence of two Erotes.¹⁹ It is believed that he emigrated to Paestum from Apulia between 340 and 330 B.C., and he must have quickly realized that his skill in detailed florals was not appealing to Paestan clientele, as this is his only surviving piece to feature them.

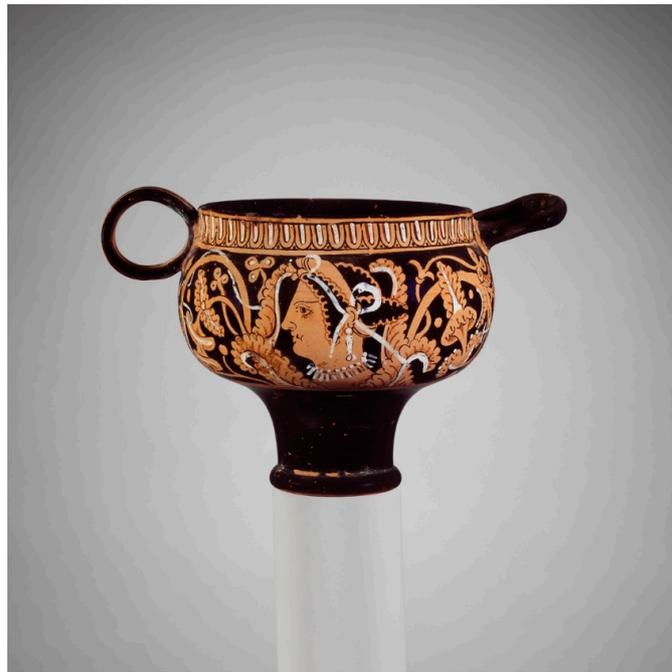


Figure 6. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.286.33 Etruscan skyphos, Tondo Group, ca. 325–300 B.C. Female head in profile to left in floral setting. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Floral motifs strikingly similar to those on Apulian vases occur in other contemporary media, including southern Italian molded terracottas²⁰, gold jewelry produced in Taranto (the single Greek settlement in Apulia)²¹, and pebble mosaic floors found in a variety of locations including Pella, Durrës

¹⁷ See the floral tendrils flanking a female head in three-quarter view to left on the shoulder of the Campanian hydria Louvre K 276 attributed to the Libation Painter (Trendall 1967, p. 406, no. 301, pl. 160, 1).

¹⁸ Such florals are most frequently found on vases of the Clusium Group and Tondo Group, both of which believed to have been based in Chiusi, although some of the earlier Clusium Group may have been made in Volterra. For examples, refer to the pair of skyphoi New York 07.286.33 and 51.11.1 (De Puma 2013, p. 211) and Sydney, Nicholson Museum 6847 (Harari 1995).

¹⁹ Paestum 20303 (Trendall 1987, pp. 21, 237–8, no. 963, pl. 145). For more information on the Aphrodite Painter, see (Greco 1970). The only other Paestan vase-painter to include floral decoration in their work is the Floral Painter, one of the last Paestan red-figure artists, named for the flowering tendrils surrounding the female head on the reverse of a bottle found in Tomb 5 (1954) at Contrada Andriuolo in Paestum (Paestum 5426: Trendall 1987, pp. 333–34, no. 586, pl. 218b,c).

²⁰ Seen particularly on terracotta arulae (portable altars) such as Capua inv. 5324 (Bedello Tata 1990, pp. 59–60, pl. X, 2–3), Capua 5320 (ibid., pp. 62–63, pl. XII, 1), and Trieste inv. 2333/34 (Van der Meijden 1993, p. 331, pl. 16), and the floral thymiateria bases found primarily in the sanctuaries of Hera at Paestum (Stoop 1960, pl. IV, 4 and V, 1).

²¹ Such as on the gold diadem from Crispiano, Contrada Cacciavillani dated to the first half of the 4th century B.C. (Taranto 54.114, found in 1934—De Juliis 1984, pp. 118–19) and the gold Herakles knot diadem with pendants from Ginosa Marina, Contrada Chiaradonna (Taranto 22.406, found in 1927—ibid., pp. 121–22) of the late 4th or early 3rd century B.C. For discussion of floral decoration in Greek gold jewelry, see (Williams and Ogdén 1994, pp. 41–43).

(ancient Epidammos), Vergina, and Sicyon (Robertson 1965, pp. 72–79; Petsas 1965; Robertson 1967; and Salzmann 1982, pp. 14–19. 28. 51–52. 90. 105–8. 112–5)²² (Figures 7–9). Roberston and García argued that these complicated patterns of flowering vines were derived from the flower paintings of Pausias of Sicyon, who was inspired by the garlands woven by his love Glycera (Pliny, *NH* 21, 4, 35, and 125; Robertson 1965, pp. 82–83; Robertson 1975, pp. 485–86; García 2015, pp. 23–25 and 57–67). Pausias' flourit appears to have been around 370–360 B.C. (Harari 1995, p. 205; García 2015, pp. 3–11), nearly simultaneous with the earliest appearance of floral tendrils on Apulian vases, suggesting that the motif either developed simultaneously and independently in various areas of the Greek world or artisans in Taranto may have been the original source.²³ To my knowledge, no examples of the motif definitively predate those occurring on South Italian vases. A further source of inspiration for the rising interest in the vegetal realm during the first half of the 4th century B.C. might be the botanical scholarship of Theophrastus of Eresus (ca. 372/1–287/6 B.C.), author of *Enquiry into Plants and Causes of Plant Phenomena*, who succeeded his teacher Aristotle as the head of the Lyceum in Athens.²⁴

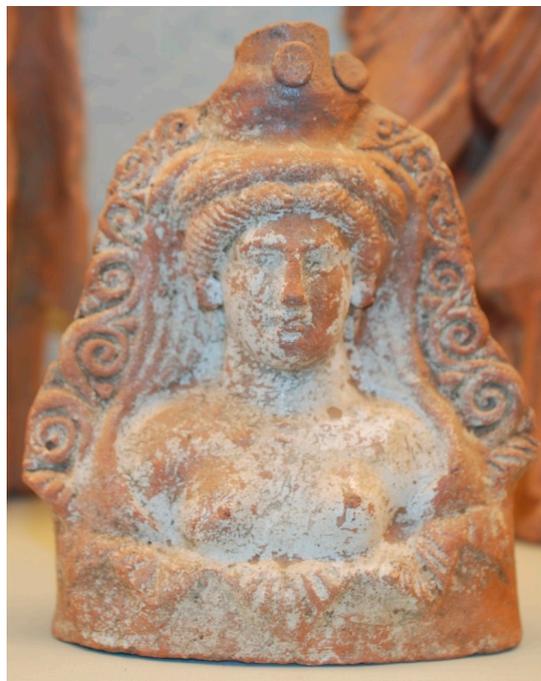


Figure 7. Paestum, Museo Archeologico Nazionale Floral thymiaterion base from the southern urban sanctuary, late 4th century B.C. Author's photo.

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- ²² Franks (2018, pp. 151–56 and 174–77) proposes that the popularity of the floral tapestry style mosaics is due to their being well suited to the space of the andron as they do not privilege any viewing angle, are readable even when the sightline is obscured, and can easily accommodate other figural themes within them. She argues that their inclusion within the sympotic space may have been intended to evoke in the minds of the banqueters a rustic or primordial paradise.
- ²³ Michael Pfrommer and François Villard in particular have argued in favor of southern Italian influences on Macedonian art, pointing in particular to the similar tendril decoration found in both areas (Pfrommer 1982, pp. 129–32; Villard 1998, pp. 218–20). Others, however, have expressed doubts regarding their proposal (e.g., Drougou 1987, p. 313 and Vokotopoulou 1990, pp. 40–41), Nalimova (2017) favors the development of floral imagery in multiple areas of the Greek world, namely southern Italy, Attica, and the Argolid that in turn influenced Macedonian visual culture.
- ²⁴ For further information on Theophrastus and the impact of his scholarship in the study of botany and medicine, see Scarborough 1978; Morton 1981, pp. 29–43; Lloyd 1983, pp. 119–35; Greene and Egerton 1983, pp. 128–211; Baumann 1993, pp. 15–18; and Hardy and Totelin 2016, pp. 8–10.



Figure 8. Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 54114 Gold diadem decorated with floral tendrils and acanthus calyx from Crispiano, Contrada Cacciavillani, first half 4th century B.C. Author's photo.



Figure 9. Pella, House of the Abduction of Helen: Stag Hunt Mosaic, ca. 340/330—320/310 B.C. Author's photo.

3. The Garden's Inhabitants

Most of the flowering tendrils on Apulian vases are occupied by various figures that overwhelmingly adhere to particular types. The first group consists of mythological entities that repeatedly appear on grave monuments throughout the Greek world as early as the Archaic period, including Amazons²⁵, sphinxes²⁶, and sirens²⁷ (Figure 3). The presence of characters connected with the sepulchral realm is not surprising as nearly all South Italian vases are uncovered in mortuary contexts. Many Apulian volute-kraters, amphorae, and loutrophoroi were clearly intended to function solely as grave goods due to their perforated bases, preventing them from serving as a container for

²⁵ e.g., Oxford 1945.55, an alabastron attributed to the Chini Painter (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 16/74, p. 429), and on the neck of the obverse of St. Petersburg inv. 1711 = St. 371 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 17/71, p. 471), a volute-krater by the Loebbecke Painter.

²⁶ See the sphinxes in floral settings on the necks of these volute-kraters: University of Mississippi, David M. Robinson Memorial Collection krater attributed to the Loebbecke Painter (*ibid.*, 17/69, p. 470) and Geneva HR 44 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1991–1992, 17/77, p. 135, pl. XXXII, 3–4).

²⁷ Sirens are found in floral surrounds on a variety of shapes including the volute-krater Naples 3255 (inv. 81934, Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/42, p. 496), the loutrophoros Bari 5591 (*ibid.*, 28/107, p. 928), and a pelike once on the French Market by the Painter of the Siren Citharist (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1983, 18/334b, p. 87). For the use of Amazons, sirens, and sphinxes in Greek funerary iconography, see Richter and Guarducci 1961, pp. 6–7; Kurtz and Boardman 1971, pp. 86 and 134–35; Woysch-Méautis 1982, pp. 83–87. 134–36. 91–99. 137–140; Ridgway 1993, pp. 232–34; Tsiafakis 2003; Langridge-Noti 2003, pp. 144–45; Cook et al. 2005, pp. 34–35 and 42–64; and Russenberger 2015, pp. 231–97.

the living.²⁸ Dionysian subjects, including the god himself²⁹, his consort Ariadne³⁰, and his followers (satyrs³¹ and nymphs/maenads³², also occur in floral surrounds. Dionysos was a vegetation deity closely linked with victory over death, exemplified by the retrieval of his mortal mother, Semele, from Hades³³, and his own physical resurrection according to the mystery aspects of his cult.³⁴

Winged or flying creatures, reminiscent of the many species of insects and birds that hover over blossoms in nature, are also common in the presence of flowering tendrils. Sometimes they may be part of a narrative, including Bellerophon's triumph over the Chimaera³⁵ and divine abductions that resulted in immortality for the god's beloved, such as Boreas and Oreithyia³⁶ or Zeus and Ganymede³⁷ (Figure 1). The ability to fly suggests a liminal status, the capacity to exist between earth and sky, and thus might have been seen as appropriate for objects intended to accompany the dead in the journey between mortal life and the hereafter. Indeed, Thanatos, the personification of death (Vermeule 1979, pp. 148–52; Bazant 1994), and the eidolon (the soul of the deceased separated from the body)³⁸ are depicted as winged (Siebert 1981; Peifer 1989; De Velasco 1995, pp. 73–91; Vollkommer 1997; Bardel 2000; Oakley 2004, pp. 211–13). The soul is even occasionally shown as a bird, such as the soul-bird hovering over the dying Prokris on a column-krater by the Hephaistos Painter in London³⁹, and the frequent presence of birds on Attic grave stelai, often shown as pets in their owners' hands, may allegorically reference the departure of the soul from the corpse (Woysch-Méautis 1982, pp. 39–53 and 110–24; Clairmont 1993, pp. 81–84; Oakley 2003, pp. 180–81).⁴⁰ The birds occupying the blossoming vines on Apulian vases might be interpreted similarly.⁴¹ Given the vases' funerary context, other flying figures in floral surrounds could reference the overcoming of death, such as the appearance of Helios in his chariot on the necks of three volute-kraters, who could perhaps serve as a symbol of

²⁸ In Taranto, these large vases were used as grave markers (Lippolis 1994, pp. 109–28; Fontannaz 2005, p. 126) and were particularly favored grave goods in the elite Italic rock-cut chamber tombs of central and northern Apulia. The Italic demand for these monumental pieces is likely what led two of the most prominent Apulian workshops of the third-quarter of the 4th century B.C., led by the Patera and Baltimore Painters, to establish themselves in the native communities of Ruvo and Canosa respectively (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, p. 450; Robinson 1990; Carpenter 2003).

²⁹ Seen on the neck of a volute-krater attributed to the Bassano Group in a private collection in Naples (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 30/20, p. 1020–21, pl. 393).

³⁰ The divine couple appear together on the pelike London, V & A 2493.1910 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/6, pl. 137, 5–6) and on the shoulder of an amphora possibly by the Darius Painter once on the French market (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1991–1992, 18/47c, p. 148).

³¹ A silen holding a cithara appears on one side of an alabastron once on the Roman market (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 21/22, p. 606, pl. 232, 7).

³² Such as on Dublin 1880.1106 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/37, p. 402, pl. 142, 1–2) and Canberra, Australian National University U.H. 6 (ibid., 16/79, p. 430).

³³ See Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* III, 38; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 4.25.4; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.37.6; and Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 251.

³⁴ Refer to Kern, *Orphicorum fragmenta* fr. 210, Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 3.62.6; and Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 167. The most recent discussions of the cult of Dionysos in Magna Graecia, along with substantial earlier bibliography, may be found in Casadio and Johnston 2009. For representations of Dionysos in Apulian vase-painting, see Carpenter 2011.

³⁵ For example, see the interior of the patera attributed to the Patera Painter's workshop from Altamura now in Taranto (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 23/295, p. 764) and on the neck of a volute-krater attributed to the Baltimore Painter in a German private collection (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1991–1992, 27/22–2, p. 273). Another example of a narrative with a flying protagonist surrounded by flowering vines is the representation of Phrixos on the Ram on the fragment of the neck of a volute-krater in Taranto (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/42a, p. 497).

³⁶ Refer to the chous Louvre K 35 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/11, p. 396, pl. 139, 1), where the figures are dwarfed by the floral decoration surrounding them.

³⁷ Ganymede's abduction by Zeus in the form of an eagle occurs on the neck of a volute-krater attributed to the Baltimore Painter in a Swiss private collection (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 25/1, p. 795–96).

³⁸ Eidola most frequently appear on late Archaic and Classical white ground lekythoi, but they do appear on occasionally on other Attic shapes.

³⁹ London, British Museum E 477, ca. 460–430 B.C. (ARV² 1114, 15). See also (Vermeule 1979, p. 18).

⁴⁰ In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Theseus compares the dead Phaedra to a bird that has vanished from the hand (828–29), and in his *Consolation to his Wife*, written on the occasion of his toddler daughter's death, Plutarch compares the soul to a captured bird who becomes domesticated and used to this mortal life (611e). For an earlier association of birds with the deceased in Attica, see their inclusion in prothesis scenes on Geometric vases and resting on the corpse in the terracotta model of an ekphora found at Vari of the early 7th century B.C. (Garland 1985, pp. 26, 32–33).

⁴¹ e.g., on the shoulder of Taranto 7014 from Ceglie del Campo (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 28/48, p. 916).

daily regeneration and hoped-for continuation of the deceased in the afterlife⁴² (Figure 10). Similarly, Nike's repeated presence in lush flora on Apulian vases of varying shapes might visually embody victory over the grave through nature's regenerative powers wielded by the divine⁴³ (Figure 5).



Figure 10. Boston 03.804 Apulian volute-krater, close to the Varrese Painter, ca. 340 B.C. (a) Helios in floral surround (neck) and death of Thersites (body). (b) Eros seated on flower in floral setting (neck) and youth with horse in naiskos surrounded by three women and three youths with offerings (body). Photographs © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Eros is the most frequent full-length figure enclosed in blossoming tendrils and seated on flowers, occurring on nearly 80 examples, sometimes in the presence of his mother, Aphrodite (Figure 10). Likewise, women appearing alone in floral settings might also be interpreted as the goddess.⁴⁴ Eros' presence may refer to Aphrodite's repeated associations with flowers, such as her tears over Adonis' death as the origin of anemones (Giesecke 2014, p. 53), and her art of using of floral scents to

⁴² Boston 03.804 (ibid., 17/75, p. 742), Swiss private collection (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/41, p. 496, pl. 177), and New York private collection (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1983, 28/86b, p. 174, pl. 33, 2 and 34, 2). On the last of the three, Helios, wearing a short red tunic and with rays above his head, rises instead from a flower in a floral setting. While I believe the full length figures in floral surrounds very likely have funerary connotations, my view opposes that of Schauenburg, who pointed toward the presence of Helios and Phrixos and the Ram in such contexts, which he did feel did not have demonstrable sepulchral associations. See Schauenburg 1957, pp. 208–9.

⁴³ For example on the situla Ruvo 1372 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/36, p. 402), the amphora Berlin 3242 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/235, p. 524), and the volute-krater Trieste S 494 (ibid., 25/2, p. 796).

⁴⁴ A single woman in a floral surround is found on eleven vases in the sample pool, such as Kassel T. 561 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 16/78, p. 430) and Kiel, Kunsthalle B 562 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1983, 27/60b, p. 157, pl. XXX, 2). On several occasions swans, another possible reference to Aphrodite, also appear in a floral setting in Apulian vase-painting, such as several volute-kraters once on the market in Basel (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1991–1992, 17/20–8, pl. 116), London (ibid., 22/561b, p. 217, pl. LVI, 7), and New York (ibid., 27/67e, p. 284).

enhance physical comeliness.⁴⁵ Another possibility is that when selecting to include the god's image on these funerary objects, Apulian vase-painters and their Greek and Italic clientele considered Eros' role as a primordial creative force, documented first in Hesiod's *Theogony* (116–22) and especially emphasized in the Orphic cosmogony (Guthrie 1935, pp. 83–84, 95–97; Kerényi 1950; West 1983, p. 70; Edmonds 2013, pp. 163–65).⁴⁶ Perhaps it was thought that Eros' powers could be called upon to ensure the continuation of life after death. Plato describes Eros' conception as taking place in the garden of Zeus during the banquet celebrating the birth of Aphrodite⁴⁷, and mythical seductions repeatedly happen in fertile flowery meadows or gardens, including the hieros gamos of Hera and Zeus⁴⁸ and the abductions of Persephone⁴⁹ and Europa⁵⁰. Eros' regular ties to the vegetal realm in literature as well as visual culture, as Cabrera has pointed out, suggest that flora was considered both by-product of the god's procreative powers and the ideal setting for reproduction to occur (Cabrera 2005, pp. 153–55).

However, most occupants of the extravagant Apulian floral tendrils are isolated heads rather than full-length figures, typically truncated at the base of the neck and rising from flowers or acanthus leaves.⁵¹ The most frequent variations, appearing on over 700 vases, are those of women (Figures 2 and 4). Occasionally they are flanked by Erotes, perhaps identifying the head as that of Aphrodite, but such easy recognition is relatively rare.⁵² Generally, the female heads are indistinguishable from their mortal and divine full-length counterparts on South Italian vases, and even when they are given possible indications of immortal status, such as polos-crowns⁵³ or a nimbus⁵⁴, they are still too indeterminate to afford more specific conclusions (Figure 11).

⁴⁵ For example, in her seduction of Anchises: Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite 58–67 (trans. Martin L. West, 2003, Loeb Edition, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, pp. 164–65).

⁴⁶ This concept was perhaps even jokingly referred to by Aristophanes in his *Birds* (693–701).

⁴⁷ Plato, *Symposium* 203b–c. Here Eros' parents are Poros (Resource) and Penia (Poverty).

⁴⁸ Homer, *Iliad* XIV, 347–351. Another example of sexual relations set in a lush floral surround is Poseidon's liaison with Medusa (see Hesiod, *Theogony* 279).

⁴⁹ Homeric Hymn to Demeter, 1–21. A narcissus flower here is blamed for distracting Persephone with its seductive scent and beauty, giving Hades the opportunity to seize her by force. Cabrera (2005, p. 159) argues that the collection of fruits and flowers by girls on the cusp of marriage is a metaphor for their nuptials, in which they too will be "gathered" and moved to a new home. She proposes that this collection was understood as a precursor to the journey to salvation after death.

⁵⁰ Hesiod, fr. 140 (Merkelbach and West 1967) and Bacchylides, *Fragmenta* 10.

⁵¹ Heads in floral surrounds occur over six times as often as their full-length counterparts, occurring on 910 vases in Trendall and Cambitoglou's publications. For the use and significance of the isolated head in South Italian vase-painting, see Heuer 2011 and Heuer 2015. I disagree with García's assertion (García 2015, pp. 61–67) that this motif was drawn directly from Pausias' famed portrait of Glycera with her floral garlands, as it is currently impossible to determine whether the painting predates the first appearance of heads in floral surrounds on Apulian vases and the abbreviation of the human form is a rarity in Greek art, but rather is a proclivity of Italic visual culture.

⁵² For female heads flanked by Erotes, refer to Naples 3221 (inv. 81954, Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/43, p. 497) and Ruvo 1092 (ibid., 23/226, p. 753) for examples.

⁵³ See Parma C. 96 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/64, p. 408) and Bonn 3025 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1983, 29/116c, p. 362).

⁵⁴ As seen on Bologna 567 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 23/19, p. 728) and St. Petersburg 578 (St. 354, ibid., 23/21, p. 728).



Figure 11. Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico G 475 Apulian volute-krater, Patera Painter, ca. 340–330 B.C. Female head in three-quarter view to left surrounded by nimbus and flanked by floral tendrils (detail of neck on obverse side). Author’s photo.

Heads of youths or bearded men are likewise challenging for the same reasons as are heads of indeterminate gender, like the winged heads that resemble Nike as much they do Eros, a popular figure in Apulian vase-painting often shown in highly effeminate guise⁵⁵ (Figure 12). Another head type of unclear sex is one that wears a Phrygian cap, which has been interpreted as an Amazon, Artemis Bendis, an Arimasp, Paris, and even Orpheus⁵⁶, the latter perhaps even a reference to Orphism, which, with its promises of a blissful hereafter for its adherents, seems to have found particularly fertile ground in southern Italy and Sicily.⁵⁷ (Figure 13) With the exception of the few heads of satyrs or Pan in floral settings⁵⁸, the vague identity of the heads seems to have been wholly intentional.

⁵⁵ For example, see the winged head on the reverse of a volute-krater by the Baltimore Painter now in a private collection in Naples (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 27/27, p. 866, pl. 325, 2). On the ambiguity of winged heads in South Italian vase-painting: (Cambitoglou 1954, p. 121; Schauenburg 1957, p. 212; Schauenburg 1962, p. 37; Schauenburg 1974, pp. 169–86; Schauenburg 1981, pp. 467–69; Schauenburg 1982, pp. 250–5; and Schauenburg 1984b, pp. 155–57).

⁵⁶ Examples include Vatican W4 (inv. 17162, Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/60, p. 408), Bari 6270 (ibid., 16/41, p. 417, pl. 154, 1-2), and Ruvo 409 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 17/40, p. 463). For the identification of heads wearing Phrygian caps in South Italian vase-painting: (Schauenburg 1974, pp. 171–72 and 174–85; Schmidt 1975, pp. 130–32; Schauenburg 1981, p. 468; Schauenburg 1982, pp. 253–55; Schauenburg 1984a, p. 364; and Kossatz-Deißmann 1990, pp. 517–20).

⁵⁷ A brief bibliography of Orphism: (Rohde 1907, pp. 335–61; Guthrie 1935; Mead 1965; Orfismo in Magna Graecia 1975; Detienne 1979; Edmonds 2013). The presence of Orphic worship in Magna Graecia is supported by ancient texts that closely associate the cult with the Pythagorean movement in Magna Graecia (Herodotus 2.81; Diogenes Laertius 8.8). Pythagoras emigrated from Samos to Croton around 520 B.C. and is believed to have died in Metaponto at the end of the sixth century B.C. His followers established so-called clubhouses throughout southern Italy and Sicily until ca. 450–415 B.C., when they were destroyed during an outbreak of civil unrest (Polybius 2.39). The most concrete evidence for the practice of Orphism in Magna Graecia is provided by the famous inscribed gold lamellae, or tablets, found in tombs in Lucania at Hipponium, Thurii, and Petelia; see (Kern 1922; Pugliese Carratelli 1988, pp. 162–70; Maddoli 1996, pp. 495–96; Pugliese Carratelli 2003; Graf and Johnston 2007; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008).

⁵⁸ For a head of Pan, refer to Vatican AA 2 (inv. 18255, Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 8/13, p. 194), and for satyrs, see St. Petersburg 583 = St. 816 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 17/63, pp. 468–69) and New York, Fleischmann coll. F 99 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1991–1992, 18/293b, p. 162, pl. XLI, 3).



Figure 12. Boston 89.376 Apulian oinochoe (shape 1), White Sakkos Painter, ca. 320–310 B.C. Winged head in three-quarter view to left emerging from a flower and flanked by floral tendrils. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Figure 13. London, British Museum F 279 Apulian volute-krater, Darius Painter, ca. 340–320 B.C. Head wearing Phrygian cap rising from red flower in floral surround (neck) and the death of Hippolytos (body). Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

In only one instance is such a head inscribed, labeled as Aura (“Breeze”) on the neck of a volute-krater now in the British Museum.⁵⁹ Either the meaning of the heads was so recognizable to the ancient viewer that further iconographic or written identifiers were deemed unnecessary or the ambiguity was desirable, perhaps to allow for greater flexibility in interpretation and function dependent upon the user’s ethnic and religious background in the cultural melting pot of pre-Roman Italy and Sicily.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the image of a head springing forth from vegetation and surrounded by it does visually imply that the iconographic combination has to do with concepts of the cyclical continuation of life, a crucial component of nature and eschatological beliefs. This interpretation is greatly strengthened by examining the types of scenes painted in conjunction with floral tendrils on Apulian vases.

Flowering vines and their inhabitants often occur as secondary decoration on large-scale vases whose primary décor consists of illustrations of mythological stories involving the demise of one or more individuals, such as the beheading of Thersites at the hand of Achilles for his disparaging comments regarding Penthesilea on the body of a volute-krater in Boston⁶¹ (Figure 10), the death of Hippolytos by the Darius Painter on a volute-krater in London⁶² (Figure 13), or the gradually petrifying Niobe weeping at the tomb of her lost children on a loutrophoros in Malibu.⁶³ (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 82.AE.16 Apulian red-figure loutrophoros, Painter of Louvre MNB 1148, ca. 330 B.C. Winged female wearing a polos and terminating tendrils in floral surround (neck) and the mourning of Niobe in a naiskos with Pelops and Hippodamia driving up in a chariot to urge her to stop grieving (body). Digital image courtesy of the Getty Open Content Program.

⁵⁹ London, British Museum F 277: (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 8/5, p. 193).

⁶⁰ Refer to Heuer (forthcoming).

⁶¹ Boston 03.804—from Ceglie del Campo, possibly by the Loebekke Group (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 17/75, p. 742).

⁶² London, British Museum F 279: (ibid., 18/17, p. 487).

⁶³ Malibu 82.AE.16—attributed to the Painter of Louvre MNB 1148 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1983, 20/278a, p. 100, pl. XIX, 1–2. An illustration of the same scene with floral tendrils also appears on Taranto 8935 from Canosa and Naples 3246 (inv. 82267), earlier amphorae by the Varrese Painter (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 13/4, p. 338 and 13/22, p. 341, respectively).

The rescue of figures from certain death, either through heroic intervention or the granting of immortality (sometimes via forcible abduction by a deity), are also paired with floral tendrils. For example, a female head in a floral surround appears above Perseus saving Andromeda on a loutrophoros by the Darius Painter in Naples⁶⁴ and above Aphrodite and Persephone pleading for Adonis' life in the upper register of another loutrophoros by the same hand in New York⁶⁵ (Figure 15). The lush flora also appears in conjunction with representations of the Underworld and its inhabitants, exemplified by the Underworld Painter's name-vase in Munich depicting Orpheus before the palace of Hades and Persephone, perhaps with a family of Dionysian or Orphic initiates beside him, in the presence of Sisyphos, Tantalos, and Herakles taking Kerberos, among other denizens of the afterlife⁶⁶ (Figure 16).



Figure 15. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 11.120.3a,b Apulian loutrophoros, Darius Painter, ca. 340–330 B.C. Female head in floral surround emerging from acanthus (lid), female head rising from flower and flanked by floral tendrils (shoulder), male deity (Hades? Zeus?) adjudicating between Persephone and Aphrodite regarding Adonis' immortality (upper register on body), grave stele between youths and women (lower register on body). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁶⁴ Naples 3225 (inv. 82266), from Canosa (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/58, p. 500). Other vases with female heads among flowering vines and the rescue of Andromeda include Bari 5591 (ibid., 28/107, p. 928), a hydria by the Darius Painter once on the Zurich market (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1983, 18/63a, p. 78, pl. XI, 3–4), and a hydria in a German private collection attributed to the Baltimore Painter (ibid., 27/60a, p. 156, pl. XXX, 1).

⁶⁵ New York 11.210.3 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/20, p. 489, pl. 174, 2).

⁶⁶ Munich 3297 (J. 849), from Canosa (ibid., 18/282, p. 533, pl. 194; Cabrera 2018). Other depictions of the Underworld paired with figures or heads in floral surrounds occur on Karlsruhe B 4 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 16/81, p. 431); Bari, Perrone coll. 14 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/225, p. 523); Altamura, Museo Archeologico Nazionale A 10192 (ibid., 23/293, p. 763); Bari 2396 (ibid., 27/16, p. 863); St. Petersburg inv. 1716 = St. 426 (ibid., 27/19, p. 864); a volute-krater by the Baltimore Painter in a Swiss private collection (ibid., 27/22a, p. 865, pl. 325, 1); Kiel B 585 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1991–1992, 29/A1, p. 351); and Matera, Museo Archeologico Nazionale “D.Ridola” 164510 (ibid., 29/A2, p. 351).

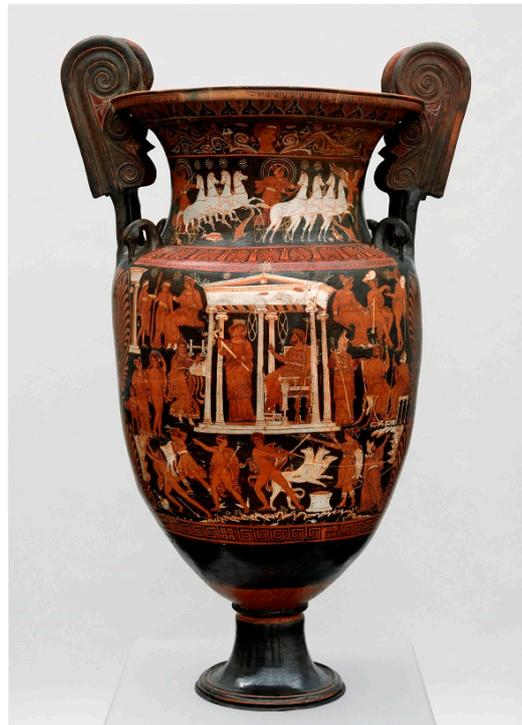


Figure 16. Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen inv. 3297 Apulian volute-krater from Canosa, Underworld Painter, ca. 330–320 B.C. Female head in floral band above Selene and Helios in quadrigae below (neck) and Underworld scene featuring Persephone and Hades in their palace (body). Photograph provided by the Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek München, Photo: Renate Kühling.

Even more frequent is the pairing of floral tendrils with scenes of figures bearing offerings around funerary monuments, either in the form of a naiskos, a small temple-like shrine, or, less often, a rectangular stele, seen on hundreds of Apulian vases⁶⁷ (Figure 10). Often the placement of the vegetal décor on the neck and shoulders of vases makes it appear as though it springs forth from the top of the grave marker itself, a visual expression of life coming forth from death. On Apulian and Campanian vases, grave markers occasionally take the form of a statue of the deceased standing on a rectangular base framed by spiraling vines⁶⁸ (Figure 17).

⁶⁷ One of the earliest examples is on Bari 1394, a volute-krater associated with the Iliupersis Painter, who was the first to paint this type of funerary scene in South Italian red-figure. On it, a frontal female head with long, loose curly hair is surrounded by spiraling tendrils on the neck directly above a grave stele topped by a helmet on the body of the vase, which is surrounded by women and men bringing offerings (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 8/101, p. 203). A few other examples of floral vines above grave naiskoi are London, British Museum F 282 by the Varrese Painter (ibid., 13/27, p. 341–42), Bonn 100 by the Lycurgus Painter (ibid., 16/14, p. 417, pl. 150, 1–2), Bari 20054 by the Gioia del Colle Painter (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 17/1, p. 457), and Malibu 80.AE.40 by the Patera Painter (ibid., 23/15, p. 728).

⁶⁸ For an Apulian example, see St. Petersburg 567 = St. 878 by the Iliupersis Painter (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 8/12, p. 194; Lohmann 1979, p. 209, pl. 9, 1). For a Campanian piece, refer to the hydria New York 06.1021.230 by the Olcott Painter (Trendall 1967, p. 411, no. 342, pl. 165, 3).



Figure 17. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 06.1021.230 Campanian hydria, Olcott Painter, ca. 360–330 B.C. Funerary statue of a bride within an arbor of tendrils flanked by youths and women. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Similar florals and tendrils occur in, on⁶⁹, and beside⁷⁰ funerary naiskoi; naiskoi containing plant-motifs occur on at least 53 Apulian vases and first appear in the work of the Lycurgus Painter during the mid-4th century B.C. (Lohmann 1979, pp. 115, 127–30; Schauenburg 1957, pp. 198–202; Jucker 1961, p. 214)⁷¹ (Figure 18). Starting in the late 4th century B.C., naiskoi made of local limestone were built in the cemeteries of Taranto (Klumbach 1937; Bernabò Brea 1952; Carter 1970; Carter 1973; Carter 1976), and at least several had floral decoration that strongly resembles their earlier painted ceramic counterparts.⁷² (Figure 19) A floral scroll frieze with a female head in the center, nearly identical to those seen in bands on the bellies of Apulian amphorae and loutrophoroi, was carved in relief in the entry passage to a 4th century B.C. chamber tomb uncovered in the Palazzo Palmieri garden in Lecce (Bendinelli 1915, pp. 10–11, 18–19, 23–24).

⁶⁹ E.g., on the base of the naiskos on the obverse of New York 1995.45.1 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1983, 18/16d, p. 72).

⁷⁰ For example, on Trieste 7598 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 28/312, p. 950, pl. 372, 5–6).

⁷¹ Lohmann records 53 Apulian, six Lucanian, and two Campanian pieces. E.g., Florence 4048 (ibid., 17/59, p. 467); London, British Museum F 353 (ibid., 19/129, pl. 208, 6); and Bologna G 327/514 (ibid., 20/225, p. 583).

⁷² See the late 4th–early 3rd century wall reliefs Taranto inv. 51387 (from Chiesa di Sant’Antonio in Taranto) and Taranto inv. 51388 (from Corso Piemonte in Taranto). A later example is the pierced sima from Via degli Angioini in Taranto (Taranto inv. 20929). The dating of the Tarentine limestone naiskoi continues to be debated, with the earliest placed between 330 and 300 B.C. and production continuing possibly as late as the second century B.C.; see (Lippolis 1987; Lippolis 1990, pp. 15–71; and Lippolis 2007). Based on extant archaeological remains, the earliest naiskoi occurring on vases do not replicate contemporary stone monuments in Apulia, although the sculptural motifs within the naiskoi echo subjects found on Attic grave stelai of the late fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Todisco has recently proposed that the Tarentine monuments were inspired by earlier representations on Apulian vases, a motif perhaps initially influenced by mainland Greek grave monuments and developed to meet the needs of Italic aristocratic patrons (Todisco 2017; Todisco 2018). For a broader discussion of the various types of Tarentine funerary markers and the various subject matter seen in funerary sculpture, see (Lippolis 1994, pp. 109–28).

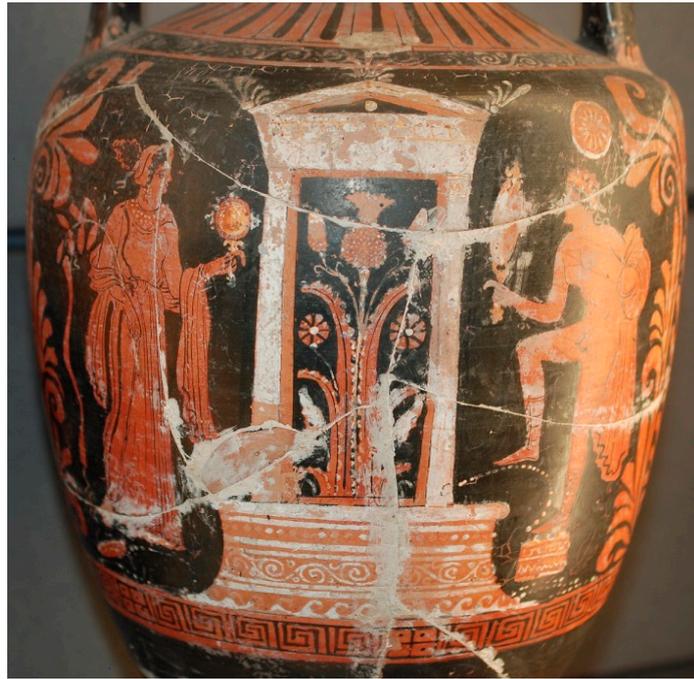


Figure 18. Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico G 327 Apulian amphora, Painter of Würzburg 853, ca. 340–330 B.C. Naiskos containing vegetation and thistle flower with woman holding mirror and branch with suspended fillet on left and youth holding handled patera on right. Author's photo.



Figure 19. Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 51388 Limestone funerary monument wall relief with acanthus calyx and flowering tendrils from Corso Piemonte in Taranto, late 4th—early 3rd century B.C. Author's photo.

Youths and women flanking these tomb monuments frequently bring branches and flowers⁷³ (e.g., the youth on the lower right on the reverse of Figure 10), a practice that corresponds well with literary references to vegetation being laid in graves (Sophocles, *Elektra* 896; Euripides, *Trojan Women* 1144 and 1247).⁷⁴ Cabrera (2005, pp. 160–62) has interpreted the offering of such flowers as a sign of

⁷³ Such as on Munich L 345 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/76, p. 411), Bari 1009 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 17/12, p. 459), and London, British Museum F 280 (ibid., 23/273, p. 761).

⁷⁴ Such offerings of flowers were originally not only expressions of piety, but also a symbol of the beauty of the deceased. See (Lohmann 1979, pp. 119–20) for discussion of flowers mentioned in funerary epigrams.

initiation needed by the deceased to enter into a paradisiacal afterlife blessed by Dionysos and Eros, as well as a symbol of the promised immortal transformation of the believers through death.⁷⁵ Painted floral garlands and suspended wreaths decorate the walls of southern Italian tombs, especially at Paestum (Pontrandolfo and Rouveret 1992, pp. 33–36 and Andreae 2007, pp. 46–47)⁷⁶ (Figure 20), and particularly distinctive are the flowering plants, including lilies and rock-roses in a barrel-vaulted tomb in Taranto, which are reminiscent of the blossom types on Apulian vases (Pontrandolfo 1990, p. 379; Pontrandolfo 1996, p. 470; Lippolis 1994, p. 135).⁷⁷ At times, the deceased were buried wearing elaborate wreaths and floral diadems strongly resembling the draftsmanship of Apulian vase-painters, such as that found in the tomb of the Daunian aristocratic woman Opaka Sabaleida, dated to the late 3rd century B.C. (De Juliis 1984, pp. 122–24)⁷⁸ (Figure 21). Indeed, descriptions of the underworld itself often include flowers. In the *Odyssey*, the dead in Hades are said to occupy fields of asphodel, a plant belonging to the lily family (11.539; 11.573; 24.13).⁷⁹ Pindar describes the islands of the blessed, the afterlife awaiting the virtuous, as a place where “flowers of gold are ablaze, some from radiant trees on land, while the water nurtures others; and these they weave garlands for their hands and crowns for their heads” (*Olympian* 2, 73–75). Even in a comedic rendition of Hades, Aristophanes notes Persephone’s blossoming grove and flowery meadows full of roses (*Frogs* 441 and 449).

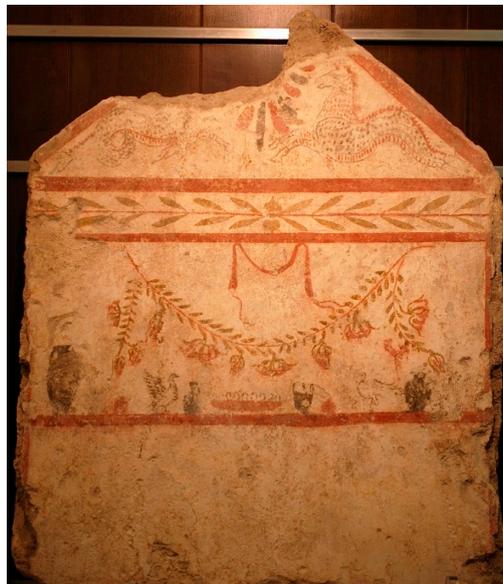


Figure 20. Paestum, Arcioni necropolis: Tomb 271, east slab painted with suspended flower garland over assorted small vases, birds, and a phiale containing eggs (?), ca. 400–375 B.C. Author’s photo.

⁷⁵ To support her interpretation, Cabrera points to examples of Eros on Apulian vases where the god holds a flower, sometimes enormous in scale, that he occasionally offers to mortals, such as on Vienna 623 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 20/299, p. 592, pl. 227, 1) and Naples, private coll. 11 (ibid., 19/86, p. 554, pl. 207, 4).

⁷⁶ For example, Paestum, Andriuolo necropolis tomb 53 (east slab) and Paestum, Arcioni necropolis tomb 271 (east slab). Spiral tendrils, wreaths, garlands, and palmettes occur in Campanian painted tombs as well. Refer to (Benassai 2001, pp. 26–29, 45–46, 50–54, 71–79, 137–43, 146–51).

⁷⁷ Taranto, tomba a camera 16, 4th century B.C.

⁷⁸ Taranto inv. 22.437.

⁷⁹ See also (Baumann 1993, p. 68). Asphodel’s root systems are not damaged during wildfires, which allows the plant to multiply rapidly in land recently cleared by fire. Various species are indigenous to southern Italy (e.g., *asphodelus fistulosus*, *asphodelus microcarpus* and *asphodelus albus*), but they do not appear to have been painted by Apulian artisans. Refer to (Pignatti 2011, vol. 3, pp. 344–47).



Figure 21. Taranto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv. 22437 Gold, carnelian, garnet, and colored enamel diadem from the Tomba degli Ori at Canosa containing the burial of an aristocratic Daunian woman named Opaka Sabaleida, late 3rd—early 2nd century B.C. Author’s photo.

4. Horticulture for the Hereafter?

The connection between the funerary realm and flowers and spiraling tendrils for the occupants of ancient Apulia is demonstrated by the vegetation’s appearance in a wide variety of media in mortuary contexts. The effort expended by the region’s vase-painters in creating such complicated floral motifs would suggest that the species they selected to represent was far from accidental, possibly serving as a pictorial language of flowers alluding to the sepulchral function of their products and expressing the hopes of the deceased and their survivors for a continuation of life beyond the grave. Certain native Mediterranean floras are readily identifiable on vases, such as thistles⁸⁰ and oak acorns⁸¹ (Figures 5 and 19). While these plants are noted in ancient texts as potential sources of food, albeit for the impoverished (Alcock 2006, pp. 47–48, 55–56), and for their medicinal qualities, such as the healing of wounds and stimulation of milk production, neither has a clear symbolic or mythological association with funerary practices or eschatological beliefs.⁸² Other flower types painted on Apulian vases might have been inspired by plants with multiple health benefits known since antiquity, such as the “tiered” flowers that resemble the chandelier-like sage blossoms, such as *Salvia argentea* (Pignatti 2011, vol. 2, pp. 502–7; D’Andrea 1982, p. 82; and Baumann 1993, pp. 123–24)⁸³ (Figure 22). However, in most instances, the stylized manner in which the flora on Apulian vases is drawn or the combination of features characteristic of multiple floral genera makes it challenging to identify particular species. For example, the flowers with a high sepal and between six and twelve petals with rounded or rectangular tips often highlighted in added white, could have been inspired by features of a variety of southern Italian wildflowers such as a member of the *Silene* genus (Baumann 1993, pp. 126–27)⁸⁴ or the white-tipped petals of the *Chrysanthemum coronarium* (Pignatti 2011, vol. 3, p. 87) (Figure 23). Some vegetation, such as when different types of flowers spring forth from each other (for example,

⁸⁰ See for example on Ruvo 1372 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/36, p. 402), Louvre K 72 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 17/65, p. 469), and Taranto 51381 (ibid., 18/42a, p. 497). On native thistle species of Italy: Pignatti 2011, vol. 3, pp. 143–67. Lohmann suggests that the thistles in Apulian vase-painting might instead be safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*), a plant found in many Egyptian tombs that was used for oil and to produce a red dye (Lohmann 1979, p. 121).

⁸¹ E.g., on the lid of the loutrophoros New York 11.210. 3 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, 18/20, p. 489) and the neck of the volute kraters Berlin 1984.41 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1991–1992, 18/41b, p. 147). For information on oak species indigenous to southern Italy, see Pignatti 2011, vol. 1, pp. 115–20.

⁸² The milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*), which grows abundantly throughout the Italian peninsula and Sicily, was particularly noted in antiquity for its healing qualities and simulation of lactation. For significance of the oak in ancient Greece: (Jashemski and Meyer 2002, p. 157; Giesecke 2014, pp. 93–95).

⁸³ The plant was believed to have such miraculous healing properties that the Latin name for the species was *salvia*, from the Latin “salvere” (to be in good health).

⁸⁴ Such as *Silene italica* (Pignatti 2011, vol. 1, p. 242), *Silene vulgaris* (ibid., p. 246), *Silene latifolia* (ibid., p. 252), or *Silene dioica* (ibid., pp. 252–53).

in Figure 11), may be flights of the painter’s fancy, fantastical creations perhaps thought appropriate for a divine or otherworldly garden setting.



Figure 22. (a) Basel, Antikenmuseum S 26 Apulian hydria, Ganymede Painter, ca. 330–320 B.C. Naiskos containing flowers flanked by women with fans and fillets. Photograph © Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig. (b) Silver sage (*Salvia argentea*). Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 23. (a) London, British Museum F 277 Apulian volute-krater, Iliupersis Painter, ca. 370–350 B.C. Head of Aura (labeled) emerging from flower flanked by tendrils. Note the flower in the upper right with white-tipped petals. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum. (b) *Silene italica*. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. (c) *Chrysanthemum coronarium*. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

One exception is the acanthus, from which floral tendrils regularly emerge⁸⁵ (e.g., Figures 2 and 5). This plant has a long tradition in funerary art, seen on Attic marble anthemion stele starting in the third quarter of the 5th century B.C. (Kurtz and Boardman 1971, p. 124)⁸⁶, as well as on funerary monuments painted on Classical Attic white-ground lekythoi⁸⁷ (Figure 24). According to Vitruvius' anecdotal story, an acanthus plant growing above the grave of a girl who died before marriage was the source of Callimachus' inspiration for designing the Corinthian column (De Architectura 4.9–10; Jashemski and Meyer 2002, pp. 85–86). There is good reason to believe that other flowers on Apulian vases referenced plants whose behaviors and properties make them well-suited for mortuary imagery. Trendall and Cambitoglou typically identified the flaring, trumpet-shaped flowers on which heads often emerge or full-length figures either stand or sit upon as a type of convolvulus (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, p. 190; Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, pp. 436. 722. 724. 858)⁸⁸, although they might also be another type of bindweed, such as the *Calystegia sylvatica* or *Calystegia sepium*⁸⁹, both prolific in southern Italy (Pignatti 2011, vol. 2, pp. 385–86) (Figure 25). Both are fast-growing climbers native to southern Europe with flowers that open to full bloom in the early morning with the dawn and close at dusk before falling off the vine to allow the seedpod to grow. This action could have been appealing as a metaphor for a cycle of life and death, following the sun's daily path across the sky.⁹⁰



Figure 24. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 25.78.30 Upper portion of the Attic marble stele of Kallidemios topped by a double palmette flanked by two half-palmettes, all rising from spiral tendrils emerging from an acanthus calyx, ca. 350–325 B.C. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁸⁵ For example, on Louvre K 35 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, 15/11, p. 396, pl. 139, 1); Dublin 1880.1106 (ibid., 15/37, p. 402, pl. 142, 1–2); and once Melbourne, Geddes coll. A 5:11 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1991–1992, 18/334b1, p. 165).

⁸⁶ Initially the acanthus was not the primary element of decoration of the anthemion and was overshadowed by the finial palmette. Soon the luxurious foliage began predominate and the leaves were almost cut free from the stone. For the significance of acanthus on grave stelai, refer to Froning 1985. See (Jucker 1961) for the later use of acanthus calyxes in Roman funerary portraits.

⁸⁷ E.g., Berlin 2680 (Oakley 2004, p. 123); Athens, National Museum 1380 (ibid., p. 134); and Athens, National Museum 14517 (ibid., p. 183). An acanthus column marking a grave appears on Athens, Kerameikos 1136 (ibid., p. 199).

⁸⁸ For discussion of convolvulus in ancient sources: (Jashemski and Meyer 2002, pp. 96, 103).

⁸⁹ The trumpet shape of the *Calystegia* is a bit taller and more pronounced with rounder edges to the petals, although the *Convolvulus althaeoides* and the *Convolvulus elegantissimus* also might be plausible identifications (Pignatti 2011, vol. 2, pp. 389–90).

⁹⁰ Another close relative to the *Calystegia* and *Convolvulus* is the *Ipomoea* genus, the seeds of several varieties of which, particularly *Ipomoea violacea*, contain the tryptamine lysergic acid amide (LSA), which has psychedelic and hallucinogenic effects when ingested. The ground seeds are known to have been used for divinatory purposes, particularly in Mesoamerica (Hofmann 1963, 1971; Amor-Prats and Harborne 1993). A member of the same family, *Ipomoea sagitta*, grows in Apulia, but there is no evidence for it having been used as an ancient narcotic. For the use of hallucinogens in the Classical world, refer to (Camilla and Ruck 2017).

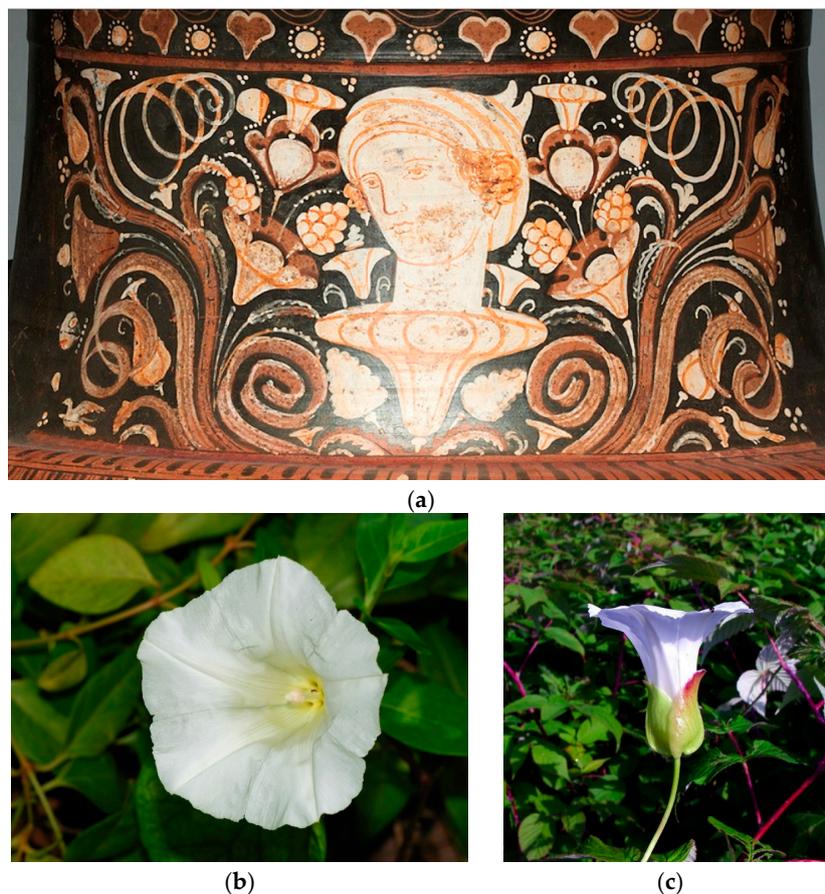


Figure 25. (a) Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria D88–1969 Apulian volute-krater, Ganymede Painter, ca. 330–320 B.C. Female head in three-quarter view to left wearing sakkos emerging from a flower surrounded by floral tendrils (detail of neck on obverse side). Author’s photo. (b,c) Large Bindweed (*Calystegia silvatica*). Photographs courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Trendall recognized the many smaller flowers as either dianthus or rock-roses (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, p. 190; Trendall and Cambitoglou 1982, pp. 436 and 858) (Figure 26). The former grows abundantly in Apulia⁹¹, and certain species had sacral connotations in the Greek world (Baumann 1993, pp. 81, 84; Jashemski and Meyer 2002, p. 108; and Pignatti 2011, vol. 1, pp. 265–73). Rock-roses are also indigenous to the region, such as *Cistus creticus* and *Cistus salvifolius* (Pignatti 2011, vol. 2, pp. 120–23), and they are remarkable for their fast renewal after wildfires, often becoming the first plant to germinate after a conflagration, the heat of which softens or cracks the seeds’ hard coating (Thanos et al. 1992; Ferrandis et al. 1999). This unique trait similarly has potential symbolic meaning as decoration on a funerary object since it is plant that quickly reemerges from soil that otherwise is empty or “dead.” Nevertheless, either identification is problematic as both of these flower species have five petals, and the edges of dianthus petals are ragged, whereas the flowers so frequently painted on Apulian vases have four, round-edged petals. A more plausible interpretation is that they are poppies, several species of which, including the sleep-inducing (and potentially fatal) opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*), are native to the central Mediterranean region (Pignatti 2011, vol. 1, pp. 354–35)

⁹¹ For example, *Dianthus balbisii*, *Dianthus rupicola*, *Dianthus carthusianorum*, and even the distinctive local type, *Dianthus tarentinus*.

(Figure 27). The narcotic effects of the plant's latex may well have been viewed as a suitable allegory for death as a blissful, painless sleep, and thus appropriate subject matter for a funerary vase.⁹²



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 26. (a) Pinks (*Dianthus tarentium*). Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. (b) Sage-leaved rock rose (*Cistus salvifolius*). Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. (c) Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 76.54 Apulian oinochoe (type 1), close to or by the Baltimore Painter, ca. 330–320 B.C. Female head in profile to left emerging from flower flanked by floral tendrils. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

⁹² Lohmann also identifies these flowers as poppies (Lohmann 1979, p. 121). On poppies in ancient Greece and Italy: Baumann 1993, p. 72; Jashemski and Meyer 2002, pp. 137–39; Jannot 2009, pp. 84–85; and Fabbri 2017.



Figure 27. Apulian poppy (*Papaver apulum*). Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

5. Conclusions

Whether intended to evoke the characteristics of specific plant species relevant to the sepulchral sphere in the minds of the ancient viewer or not, it is difficult to deny the visceral abundance of life suggested by the flowering tendrils in Apulian vase-painting reminiscent of literary descriptions of divine and paradisiacal gardens. The full-figures that occupy these intricate floral surrounds repeatedly have clear mythological and iconographic ties with mortuary iconography, such as sphinxes, sirens, Amazons, and Nike, or refer to narratives of mortals gaining eternal life including Dionysos, Oreithyia, and Ganymede. Eros and Aphrodite—the most frequent individuals surrounded by lush flora on Apulian vases—also have a potent chthonic guise in Magna Graecia and Sicily, closely linked with the cult of Persephone (Prückner 1968; Zuntz 1971, pp. 156–57; Torelli 1977, pp. 175–78; Kilmer 1977, pp. 197, 262–63; Sourvinou-Inwood 1978; Costabile 1991, pp. 127–50; Schmitt 2016, pp. 71–92, 345).⁹³ Even the heads, as incomplete figures emerging from the vegetation, effectively embody the very essence of hope for life after death itself—a desired, yet unfulfilled outcome that mirrors the regenerative cycle of nature (Heuer 2018, pp. 302–4). This interpretation is further strengthened by the consistency of the types scenes paired with the floral décor when it is utilized as a secondary decorative motif, either mythological narratives involving the concept of death, including triumph over it through immortality (such as scenes depicting Dionysos), or mourners gathered around tomb monuments. Indeed, the Greek and Italic populations of Apulia might well have agreed that death itself was no match for the tenacious tendrils that bloomed eternally on their funerary vases.

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⁹³ Aphrodite also seems to have had a chthonic guise in mainland Greece as well, suggested by the presence of Erotes around a female figure emerging from the ground in anodos scenes painted on Attic vases: Buschor 1937, p. 17; Rumpf 1950–51, p. 168; Metzger 1951, pp. 72–73; Langlotz 1954, pp. 7–8; and Sgouropoulou 2000.

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