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Ritual and Representation on a Campana Dinos in Boston

by P. Gregory Warden

“The vessel with the pestle has the brew that is true.”

A black-figure dinos in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts depicts an unusual scene that has traditionally been interpreted as the preparations for a banquet. The vessel has been attributed to the Campana group, vases that were found in Etruria, mostly at Cerveteri, and that have been attributed to two painters of East Greek origin who may have migrated to Etruria in the 6th century BCE. The Campana vases are thus part of a particular phenomenon, much like Caeretan hydriae, the Northampton Group, and Pontic vases, of objects that were presumably made by Greek or Greek-trained artists in Italy for an Etruscan elite. Our dinos thus forms part of a liminal context of material culture made up of objects that connect or bridge cultures, objects that may in fact be more revealing than things that are firmly placed in their cultural matrix, things that are “characteristic” of their culture.

Campana vases have been studied in the context of Greek vase painting, but should they be considered Greek? The question may be answered in different ways, depending on whether one considers the ethnicity of the artists, almost certainly East Greek, the place of manufacture, probably Cerveteri in Etruria, or the audience for whom they were intended, the Etruscans. The Boston Museum has presciently displayed its dinos in the context of Etruscan art, which seems proper from the point of view of the receiver or viewer of its unusual scene, given that the dinos was probably made in Etruria, purchased by Etruscans, used by Etruscans, and eventually included in an Etruscan tomb. Even if Campana dinoi have been studied in terms of Greek vase painting, it is my intention to look at this vase with Etruscan eyes, to try to unravel its meaning in terms of the Etruscans who used it and therefore imbued it with its cultural and contextual meanings. The Boston dinos shows a singular image that was constructed for an Etruscan viewer, in an Etruscan cultural context, and in this sense it may even be fair enough to refer to the vase as Etruscan rather than Greek black figure.

The Boston vase (fig. 1) has a broad narrative band that encircles its belly and
shows two events. Six nude male dancers move from right to left preceded by a nude male who plays the double flute. The dancers are shown in an animated manner, with broad movements and gestures, characteristic of the Campana group. To the left of the dancers, moving in the same direction, are the flute player and two more nude men. The first carries a large vessel and a pitcher; the other carries a pitcher and what seems to be a wicker basket. These men approach the most unusual part of the scene where a nude male and a clothed female flank a large mortar. They seem to be taking turns on the mortar with large pestles. To the left stands another nude male, facing right and playing the double flute.

The scene thus shows two related events that roughly divide the vase into two parts. There are six dancers and six figures involved in the preparation of food, if we include in the second group the two musicians who flank the scene of food preparation. The scenes are connected, and the only real break in the frieze comes at the point when figures face in different directions, the juncture between the left-facing dancer and the right-facing musician. The break is marked by a vessel shaped much like the Boston dinos

that clearly rests on a metal stand. The scene on our vase has generally been interpreted as a scene of preparation for a banquet,⁹ hence the food, the music, and the dancers, who have also been referred to as komasts. This is all well and good in the context of the Campana dinoi, for the vases are indeed often decorated with scenes of Dionysian revelry. The painter of the Boston dinos, the Painter of Louvre E736,¹⁰ along with the Painter of Louvre E739, also known as the Ribbon Painter, depicted lively dancers, satyrs and maenads, animals and centaurs, and an occasional mythological scene like the return of Hephaistos to Olympus.¹¹ The Boston scene is unusual because it stands somewhere between the identifiable mythological scenes, admittedly rare, and the more common, seemingly-generic Dionysian scenes that are the favorite subject matter of the Campana painters.

The Boston scene is unusual in the context of Etruscan art where images of the preparation of food are so rare. The best known scene of this type is found in the Golini I Tomb at Orvieto, where there is an underworld banquet with explicitly rendered details of banqueting paraphernalia and the preparation of food.¹² This tomb deserves a full,
modern study for it is exceptional in the way that it divides the painted surfaces into two parts, one made up of the elite banqueters, the other of the servants or slaves who are preparing food and serving at the banquet. What is most extraordinary, perhaps more for the inferences that can be drawn about Etruscan society, is that inscriptions identify the individual servants by name. The funerary context of these paintings, the programmatic nature of the decoration, and the clear banqueting iconography make the Golini tomb quite a different kettle of fish from our dinos. The only other example of Etruscan food preparation known to this author is a late scene on a Praenestine cista, but it is important to make a distinction between the preparation of food and the depiction of food, for food is often depicted in Etruscan art, served at ubiquitous Etruscan banquets, as early as the late Villanovan period in the case of the Montescudaio urn. While food and drink are undeniably important in Etruscan iconography, it is exceedingly rare to see food actually being prepared, and the reason may be that the preparation of food is a servile thing, while the consumption of food is the purview of the elite. Servile matters only become of visual interest when they intersect the world of the elite, as in the Golini tomb where the servants are probably imaged and identified because they are the property of the elite. Thus in other instances we will see food placed on tables, as for instance in the Tomb of the Shields at Tarquinia, or we will find wine being mixed, ladled or poured, but always in and around the physical presence of the Etruscan elite who are the raison d’etre of Etruscan iconography.

On the Boston dinos, the woman and man who almost ritually take turns with their pestles thus serve notice of an unusual visual context. But there are other elements of the Boston scene that are significant, for instance the vase that marked the juncture of the frieze. It looks a lot like the Boston dinos itself, and in fact the Campana painters seem to be quite fond of depicting vessels that look remarkably like their signature vases, but it is also reminiscent of the large ollai or “cauldrons” that are ubiquitous in Etruscan banqueting contexts, be they images or actual funerary ensembles, from the Orientalizing period onward. The popularity of these vases in a variety of media is normally attributed to the popularity of banqueting as an elite normative experience, as shown for instance on the Murlo banquet frieze where the very axis of the scene is defined by a cauldron on what is probably a metal stand. There are, of course, hundreds of other examples that might be cited. In fact, cauldron-tripods are an especially Etruscan kind of object, far more popular in the early periods than a traditional Greek krater. And again the painters of the Campana dinoi go out of their way to depict such vessels on their own vases. The cauldron or dinos is certainly more than an ersatz krater for the Etruscans, and the Campana painters make it an important part of their iconography. We might even say that it often defines their scenes in a spatial sense. A dinos in the Louvre, attributed to the same hand as the Boston dinos, depicts a cauldron or dinos on a metal stand that is both a point of departure for the satyrs dancing off to the left, and a point of arrival for the Dionysian cortege with Hephaistos that comes from the viewer’s right. This use of the vase as a spatial syntagma seems to me to be a particularly Etruscan trait; the way the Boston or Louvre scenes are constructed can be compared to a Pontic amphora in the Louvre where vases play a significant role in a double mythological scene,
undoubtedly part of a Trojan cycle. One of these scenes is easily recognizable as the ambush of Troilus, who has come to the fountain to fill a large vase. The pendant scene is less easily identified but shows a woman assaulted at an altar on which is placed a similar vase. What is interesting for our purpose here is not the identification of this second scene, which has always been problematical, but the way the two scenes are constructed and connected. The key element is the vessel, as can be seen in the side view. The same vessel is repeated in the two contexts and forms the beginning and the end of the scenes, the alpha and the omega, if you will. This is an especially Etruscan composition, treating the unpainted space under the handle as a tangible bridge between one scene and the next, and leads me to wonder if the painter of the Boston dinos is not doing the same kind of thing, imparting a special significance to the vessel, by using the motif of a dinos on a tripod as both the beginning and the end of his scene.

The syntactic importance of paraphernalia is an essential part of the Boston scene. For instance, that both food and drink are key elements is also made explicit through the figure of the man who approaches the mortar while carrying both a jug and a wicker basket. The basket can only hold solid food and the painter goes out of his way to indicate the reticulate arrangement and loose handles of this particular type of container. The combination of food and drink suggests that there is more depicted here than a simple banquet, that we may be viewing a scene of religious ritual, especially if we extrapolate from Greek sacrifice where grain and wine were important ritual components, but there is better evidence at hand.

The Ricci hydria in the Villa Giulia Museum was found at Cerveteri and has been attributed to the same workshop as the Boston dinos, but to the other painter of Campana dinoi, the Ribbon Painter. In this case there is no question that we are witnessing ritual, that we have indeed entered another liminal world, the place where human and divine come together through ritual. This hydria has become well known of late because of the explicit scene of sacrifice on its shoulder, and it has been used to reconstruct ritual literally, as a kind of manual of religious butchery. The shoulder imagery is indeed remarkably specific; it shows a procession, animal slaughter, the placing and cooking of meat on spits, and a possible ritual ablution, but specificity and realism are quite different things. The Ricci ritual is deliberately ambiguous in its spatial and temporal context, and the scene is not constructed in a chronologically or spatially sequential manner. What seems more important to the painter than a sequence of events is the spatial definition of the realm of the human and divine. Laurenshas pointed out the importance of the intertwined vine and ivy plants that frame the scene and form a literal manifestation of divinity. The artist has punctuated the scene’s rhythm through an unusual device, by placing an oversize bunch of grapes over each ritual episode, with a culminating moment where an older bearded man, who holds a kantharos and leads the procession, lifts his arm to touch the grapes over his head. This is the only place in the scene where human and divine actually meet. The scene’s frame is a living thing, actual vines that emerge from the far ends of the panel and intertwine to encompass the scene. The ivy vine springs from the left and the grape vine from the right. On the far left of the panel, at the key point where the ivy vine is rooted in the earth, we find an explicit and important detail: the ivy
vine grows from the ground, on which is placed an amphora, and from a low branch hangs what seems to be a basket. Two vessels once again, specifically rendered, at a key point from which springs the entire scene. Vessels once again, as on the Boston dinos and on the Pontic amphora, are the crucial syntagmatic elements that define and identify our scene, and the painter of the Ricci hydria explicitly depicts a wine vessel and a food basket.

On the Boston dinos, as on the Ricci hydria, food is the essential element, and the iconographical details point to preparation for a sacrifice. But what kind of ceremony is this? As on the Ricci hydria, the interpretation will depend on whether the scene is viewed as a slice of daily life, a kind of genre scene, or as carefully constructed image that does not purport to be a kind of “snapshot” of a real event. The Ricci hydria demonstrates, as we have seen, that the Campana painters were interested in depicting ritual through scenes that are not images of actual events but symbolic structures that would have evoked to the ancient viewer both the ritual and its meaning, the articulation of a social and religious landscape that connected all the participants in the ritual to divinity.
In a broader sense this kind of representation is what Peirce has called “collocations in visual form of concepts about culture.” The Ricci hydria is not a manual of the instrumentality of sacrifice, of ritual butchery, a sequential reconstruction of the proper steps to religious cuisine. It is rather a narrative that “collocates” ritual acts whose cumulative narrative power results from evocation of a shared cultural vocabulary. Its discrete vignettes culminate in the simple act of touching a bunch of grapes, of human communion with divinity. The Ricci hydria does not depict an actual event because its narrative interest, the communion of human with divine, cannot be physically depicted. The Boston dinos with its elusive and allusive imagery creates a similar environment through less complex narration. If the Boston scene seems generic, it is only because we, the modern viewers, are not able to bring the proper symbolic understanding, the shared cultural vocabulary, to the table. Interestingly, even though the Boston scene has almost always been identified as generic, when Fairbanks first published this vase in 1919 he suggested that the scene might depict a ritual: “Certainly the scene under discussion is a religious ceremony…. Further the scene is in contrast with that of other vases in the same…series

in the fact that nothing suggests a Dionysian ceremony; no Satyr, Silenos, or symbol of
that worship is present; the dance is not orgiastic, and a solemn priestess assists at the cer-
emony. Fairbanks went on to analyze this vase in the context of Greek religion but had
trouble connecting it to Greek ritual. He eventually resorted to connections with the
preparation of mystic drinks mentioned by Homer. The problem here is not with
Fairbanks’ reading of the scene as ritual, even if he may have been prone to an early 20th-
century predilection for interpreting almost everything in religion terms, but in the insis-
tence on considering it a Greek scene. In an Etruscan context the female figure that
Fairbanks thought precluded the “orgiastic” rites of Dionysos need not be a priestess but
a participant. In fact, many of the Campana dinoi do indeed depict Dionysian themes.
Furthermore, the iconographical connections to the Ricci hydria, which certainly shows
a Dionysian ritual, suggest that the preparations and festivities of the Boston dinos are
probably Dionysian.

The possibility exists that the entire class of Campana vases, with their rare
mythological scenes and constant Dionysian revelry, including the prominent depiction
of actual dinoi in these scenes, may in fact have been intended for Dionysian festivals.
This is especially evident if the Boston dinos is placed in the context of the entire class of
Campana dinoi. The male dancers, for instance, are paralleled on several other dinoi,
including examples in Florence and Paris that exclusively depict male dancers in poses
far more energetic than on the Boston vases; in some cases the gestural quality of the fig-
ures is so exaggerated as to render the dancers as almost swimming in space. This kind of
scene is no doubt connected to more overtly Dionysian scenes of dancing satyrs and
prancing maenads, as on the eponymous vase of the painter of our Boston dinos. Our
female figure, Fairbank’s “solemn princess,” is more likely a mere maenad. The over-
whelming Dionysian nature of the repertoire of the Campana vases, combined with the
insistence of the Campana painters on including representations of actual dinoi in these
scenes, makes for a cogent narrative. We are in the presence of Dionysos. Could this
have been the meaning, the reading, of these vessels for the banqueters who would have
used them and viewed them? Furthermore, in an Etruscan context, where these vases
were eventually deposited in elite tombs, the Dionysian connection takes on an interest-
ing secondary reading given the symbolism of Dionysos for the afterlife. Also worthy of
further scrutiny is the question of the relationship of the Campana painters to monu-
mental funerary painting in nearby Tarquinia.

This is food for the gods, but also food for thought. We need to be cautious in
differentiating between Greek and Etruscan cultural and artistic contexts, but iconogra-
phy needs to be culturally contextualized. Questions of ethnicity may need to be
rephrased as questions of cultural context. I would argue, as have others, that Etruscan
banquets are different from Greek symposia; that Etruscan heavyset nude male dancers
need not be komasts in the Greek sense; and that Etruscan sacrifice would not necessar-
ily have had an exact counterpart in the Greek world. While in the case of liminal objects
such as the Campana dinoi we might be safer avoiding labels altogether, the Boston dinos
offers an interesting case study because it does raise questions about the way we have tra-
ditionally viewed Etruscan visual culture. The Boston scene can be comprehended. It can
serve as a kind of visual text, but its language may be Etruscan rather than Greek. Recent scholarship has grappled with questions of comprehending Etruscan visual culture through the distinctive lens of an Etruscan cultural context. This is obviously easier to do with Etruscan mirrors than with Campana dinoi, vases produced in Etruria by Greek immigrants under the mechanisms of Etruscan patronage. I believe that it may be time to include them in the corpus of Etruscan images, to appropriate them, if you will, along with Caeretan hydriai, Pontic vases, and the like, and to subject them to the same kind of scrutiny, in an Etruscan context that has been afforded characteristically and indubitably Etruscan objects such as bronze mirrors or funerary urns. Such vases are an important component of Etruscan material culture. They are both Greek and Etruscan, liminal, and therefore a far different kettle of fish. The Boston dinos depicts a carefully constructed scene that may have a very specific meaning in its original social and cultural context. That meaning has become ambiguous to the modern viewer for etiological reasons. That same meaning was transformed from a Greek to an Etruscan context, as Greek painters worked to create objects for an Etruscan market, and later again transformed through another contextual change, when the Boston dinos was no longer used in daily life or ritual and came to be carefully deposited in an Etruscan tomb. There is still much left open to question, but the Boston dinos shows a singular and literally fabulous scene, and as Kurt Gödel, the great 20th-century logician, once said, “Only fables present the world as it should be, and as if it had meaning.”

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ADDENDUM

The 2007 article by J.M. Hemelrijk (with contributions from Elizabeth den Boer) on “Four New Campana Dinoi, A New Painter, Old Questions,” Babesch 82/2: 365-390, appeared as my article was going to press, and its arguments thus could not be incorporated, but I would like to comment briefly on those arguments that have direct bearing on my own conclusions regarding the Boston dinos. These comments are entirely my own and are written in January 2008 after my article was edited by Richard De Puma and submitted for publication.

Hemelrijk’s article provides some beautiful color images of the Boston dinos, as well as some excellent details that support what seems to me to be a convincing case for the identification of a third hand responsible for Campana vases. The author’s connoisseurship and erudition are evident, but there is much less interest in the broader aspects of imagery. Most unfortunate is the dismissal of methodologies that attempt to examine the images in new ways, that analyze the images as constructs, or that attempt to study
the patronage behind the images. For instance, the programmatic interpretation of the Ricci hydria by Cerchiai, discussed above, is considered “imaginative hyper-interpretation,” which should “be wholly ignored.” (381) What is ignored is the question of whether patronage can be linked to meaning. It seems to me logical to at least attempt to see whether the different scenes on a vase might be related to each other, or whether there might be some intent on the part of the artist to communicate to the viewer. When the scenes are as complexly structured as those on the Ricci hydria, the message might indeed be more than hyper-interpretation. To say that the sacrifice scene on the Ricci hydria is “paratactic in a traditional way and shows the usual simple naivety of the painter” (371) begs the question. The Ricci scene is hardly naïve in the way it is constructed, and in any case paratactic juxtaposition need not preclude meaning. Hemelrijk goes on to describe the other scenes on the hydria as “pretentious, though now...of a finicky, over detailed precision with innumerable fussy incisions....” (371) We are also told that “The composition is simple (apart from the kneeling Thetis) and the result, therefore, may be interesting but is weak.” What does this mean? And what does it matter in terms of understanding the representation? In this case the method, the absolute dominance of style and what constitutes proper Greek style, is by nature reductive, creates an instructional tone, and, it seems to me, fails to acknowledge the real merits of the Campana painters. These merits are innovative treatment of pattern, gesture, movement, and the abstraction of the human figure. These are, interestingly enough, also the strengths of Etruscan art.

Even more unfortunate is the colonialist attitude inserted by Hemelrijk into the debate, implying that only northern European scholarship is able to approach these issues scientifically. Commenting on Cerchiai’s article, Hemelrijk complains that “Incidentally, I may perhaps say that, personally, I do not at all appreciate the Italian habit of writing in Italian, compelling me to spend much time in trying to understand florid intellectual Italian prose. It is contrary to the obvious truth that Wissenschaft and scholarship and science are international; they transcend national borders and all scholarly communications ought to be made easily accessible for all students over the world. Italian, though a most beautiful language, does not fulfill that purpose.” (389, n. 127) This quote is perhaps more indicative of the historiographic biases of a discipline rooted in Anglo-Saxon tradition than of the purported scientific deficiencies of the Romance languages.

Perhaps more to the point is the question of production and origin of the Campana vases. These issues are of great importance and certainly deserved to be argued from all sides, but it is hard to argue with pronouncements that are made ex-cathedra, references for instance to “pure Greek style,” as well as references to clay analyses that are somehow considered definitive even if they are not yet scientifically published. Finally, there seems to be a rule of provenance at play here, what we might call the “Greek rule.” This rule insists on the Greek origin of an entire class of pottery as long as even one vase or even a few fragments of a group are found anywhere in the eastern Mediterranean. It is as if Etruscan objects never found their way to the east, as if we did not have the evidence of Etruscan bronzes at major Greek sanctuaries at Cyrene and Argos, or of Etruscan pottery at sites like Naukratis. These questions indeed may indeed be old, as Hemelrijk states in his title, but they deserve a fresh approach.
NOTES

1. I wish to thank J. Penny Small for informing me about this wonderful quote (spoken by Danny Kaye in the film, *Court Jester*) with the proviso that if I should ever repay her in a similar way, she need not acknowledge the debt in print. Anyone who has read Prof. Small’s acknowledgements will know what I mean.

2. Inv. 13.205. I am grateful to the Museum of Fine Arts for permission to publish this vase, and to the museum’s staff, especially Dr. Christine Kondoleon.

3. The Campana group consists mostly of dinoï, with a few hydriaï, and possibly an amphora. See Gaultier 1995, 21-22 for an up-to-date list and bibliography.


7. Cook and Dupont 1998, 111 where Cook attributes the Campana workshop to East Greek vase painters who immigrated to Etruria. For a similar opinion: Cook 1997, 151 “The opinion seems more credible that their makers were Greek settlers in Etruria.”

8. The question is not merely semantic and the answer should be based on more than the original ethnicity of the artist. It may well be best to avoid the ethic rubric altogether, and to refer merely to black figure rather than Greek or Etruscan types, especially as even later Etruscan vase painting is so eclectic in its interests, e.g., Edlund 1986 or Van der Meer 1986.


10. Cook and Hemelrijk 1963, 118: “The painter of Louvre E736 is less easy to analyse: the style of his dinoï is so debased that one is tempted to suppose it Etruscanised…”


15. I am grateful to Ann Brownlee for pointing out to me this particular predilection of the Campana painters. For the imaging of vases on vases: Neils 2004a, 28-34.


18. The vase’s detailed depiction of sacrificial butchery was discussed in an imaginative article by Cerchiai 1996 and has also figured prominently in Durant’s “topology of edible bodies.” See Durant 1989, 87-118.


20. Peirce 2004, 49. For this issue, see also Ferrari 2003.


25. Elements that seem decorative because their ubiquity on Greek vases may take on an entirely different meaning in an Etruscan context. For the issue: Sheffer 1984, Warden 2004.
26. That “…the effect of the Campana painters on Etruscan art was so much less than that of the Caeretan master” (Cook and Hemelrijk 1963, 120) remains an open question. Both groups seem to have had considerable influence on the formation of an Etruscan monumental style, as did later black figure painting. See Buccelato and Gatti 1978; Gaultier 1987.
27. Most notably Van der Meer 1995.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y


Neils, J. 2004a. “Vases on Vases.” In *Greek Vase Painting. Form, Figure, and Narrative*, edited by P.G. Warden, 28-34. Dallas.