

PRAENESTINE CIST COVERS OF WOOD

(*Tavv. XIV-XVI*)

A complete wood cist cover is in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (Pl. XIV-XV) (1). The wood is covered with painted leather. Two bronze wrestlers form the handle. The condition of the wood and of the metal is such as to prove that the attachment is ancient. This, the only complete example, may serve to establish a group of objects of great technical interest.

This cover is of willow wood (*Salix*) (2). It has warped, so that the upper surface is convex. The diameter, measured on the outside, is 0,29 m., on the inside, 0,26 m., and there is a set-back of 0,015 m. under the edge; the inner diameter of the cist must have been about 0,245 m. The wood is 0,017-0,018 m. thick. The greater part of the leather is preserved, beginning 0,015 m. from the edge, and extending under the handle. Red and blue paint can be seen at points (Pl. XV, I). It is impossible to trace the design in detail, but there were two concentric rings of red, one near the handle, one half way to the edge, and red and blue markings, perhaps in a guilloche pattern, between the two rings. The outer edge of the leather has a tooled, raised band.

The bronze handle is in the form of two wrestlers, 0,083 m. tall (Pl. XIV, 1-2). One, at the left, is nude; his right arm passes in front of his own body, and his right hand presses against his adversary's right shoulder; his left arm passes behind the other's neck, and the hand clenches the other's left. The second, at the right, is a woman wearing a tunic; her right arm is outstretched and the hand is near the shoulder, clasping the other's left hand. Both knees of both figures are bent.

(1) Walters Art Gallery, no. 54.1387.

(2) The wood was examined by Mr. Arthur Koehler of the United States Department of Agriculture. For this wood at Populonia, cf. FASOLO, *St. Etr.*, X (1936), p. 368.

Under the feet of the wrestlers are two small, irregularly shaped bronze bases, cast with them (Pl. XV, 1). Under the bases is a circular sheet of bronze, with wave pattern cut at the edge. It was fastened to the wood of the cover by bronze nails near its edge. One nail and one hole for a nail remain. The handle and the bronze sheet are attached to the cover by two bronze lugs, cast with the figures; they pass through the bronze sheet and the wood and project on the inside; a short iron pin passes through the hole of each lug (Pl. XV, 2). A piece of one pin and a cross-bar at its head have been broken off in recent times; they fit perfectly and have been replaced. A bronze ring which stands up at the centre ends with a bronze nail whose point shows through to the back of the cover.

The inner surface of the wood has split against the grain across most of the width of the cover. The extreme upper surface, protected and stiffened by the leather, has not split. An extra piece of wood was inserted on the inside, sunk into the cover; this piece has not split. The extra piece was an ancient reenforcement against splitting or against the tearing out of the lugs. It may have been put on after the cist had been used for a while.

To prevent damage to the wood, further warping, and breaking off of the cross-pins resulting from the warping, the wood has now been filled with wax. The wax has had the added benefit of solidifying and restoring the leather to something like its original texture (3).

The style of the bronze handle fixes the date of the cist cover late in Praenestine history, perhaps 300 B. C. The artistic conception is three-dimensional. The usual cist handle uses and exaggerates the architectural possibilities of two human figures standing side by side. Its figures are flat, flatter than is natural, and nothing breaks the straight, vertical lines. Its two warriors or wrestlers may bend their knees and rest their heads against each other, but they will not bend their backs. Our figures, on the contrary, have bent knees and bent backs and one of them has twisted his body and pulled his right arm under his armpit, so that his position is momentary and tense. Such plastic effect was not achieved by the best Greek sculptors much before the Hellenistic age. In a bronze

(3) This work was done in the Walters Art Gallery laboratory, by Mr. David Rosen.

foundry in provincial Praeneste, it must have been achieved even later. Therefore, one may date the cover not earlier than 300 B. C. There is one replica of this group, standing on a bar, without cist or history (4). A third, somewhat like them, is in the Bargello in Florence. Equal to them in plasticity is a group of young Dionysos and young satyr on a cist in the Villa Giulia (5).

It is safe to assert that this cist cover was made and kept at Praeneste. Most known cists come from there. This one was formerly in the Massarenti Collection in Rome (6), with five bronze cists, all certainly Praenestine (7). Praeneste's peculiar climate has preserved a large proportion of all our ancient wood (8). Upon looking through the known Praenestine material we may find indications of similar cists.

The upright figures of a man and a woman, perhaps Ajax and Cassandra, in the Villa Giulia, stand on a bar under which are two long, perforated lugs (9). These staples must have been set through something thick; that is, a wood cist cover. The appearance of the cist must have been much the same as that in Baltimore.

In the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Pl. XVI, 1) (10), is a handle in the form of a man standing on his hands and feet in a tumbler's trick today called the « back crab ». There are two long, perforated lugs under his hands, and one, at right angles to them,

(4) *Collection S. Pozzi* II (1919), no. 417; S. REINACH, *Repertoire de la Statuaire grecque et romaine* V (1924), p. 289; 1; *Rév. Arch.* ser. V 10 (1919), Pt. II, p. 233, fig. 13. I do not know the present location of this bronze.

(5) DELLA SETA, *Museo di Villa Giulia* (1918), Pl. LXII; DUCATI, *A. E.*, Pl. 240.

(6) VAN ESBROECK E. and U. and P., *Catalogue du Musée de Peinture, Sculpture et Archéologie au Palais Accoramboni, Premier étage, Place Rusticucci, N. 18, Près du Vatican*, Pt. II (1897), p. 25, no. 135. Described as part of horse trappings.

(7) One illustrated, *Walters Art Gallery, Handbook of the Collection* (1936), p. 38.

(8) DELLA SETA, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

(9) GIGLIOLI, *L'Arte Etrusca* (1935), Pl. CCXCIV, 3. Formerly in the Kircheriano Museo.

(10) Museum no. 19.193. L. 0,1127 m. To be published in the forthcoming Etruscan guide by Miss Richter. I am indebted to Miss Richter for bringing the significance of this bronze to my attention, for permission to illustrate the two handles in the Metropolitan Museum, and for help and suggestions.

under his feet. The lugs again require a cist cover of wood, of thickness about 0,01 m. A very similar handle is in the Walters Art Gallery (Pl. XVI, 2) (11). It has one lug at the centre of a bar between the hands and one under the feet, the axes of both parallel with the handle. The lugs require a wood cover, again about 0,01 m. thick. The style of these tumblers is of the fifth century B. C.

A third tumbler, of earlier fifth century style, in the Etruscan Museum of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, Copenhagen, has prongs or lugs for attachment to a thick wood cover (12). It was found at Orvieto, with fragments of a perforated bronze body, requiring a wood lining, and of a bronze plaque with cut wave pattern at the edge, from the cover. This is the necessary evidence to show that the wood covers belonged to the cists of identical technique, with bronze plates over wood linings; although all other covers placed on such cists, rightly or wrongly, are of bronze (13).

A handle in the form of two warriors carrying a fallen comrade, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (14) (Pl. XVI, 3) has a nail 0,0285 m. long cast at one end of the bar upon which the figures stand. The nail is too long for attachment to any metal object. It passed through a wood cover; then some sort of washer, probably metal, was placed over the wood and the point of the nail was hammered down from the inside, becoming flat and broad. This is a different method of attachment from the lugs, but equally suitable for wood. Of wood covers to which handles were attach-

(11) Museum no. 54.98. L. 0,114 m. Acquired by purchase, as coming from Greece. The point and one side of each lug have been cut off in modern times.

(12) POULSEN, *Aus einer alten Etruskerstadt, Det Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab. Historisk-filologiske Meddelelser* XII, 3 (1927), pp. 38-39, figs. 76-79; *Katalog des etruskischen Museums der Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek* (1927) p. 115, H 230, *Bildertafeln* 100, 101. The body and cover are restored. Is it possible that the fragments are of an oval-cist? The lower part of an oval cist with perforated body is in the Vatican, in the same case as the bronze oval cist with Venus and Adonis on the cover. For a plaque with cut wave pattern, *St. Etr.*, IV (1930), p. 41, fig. 26.

(13) DELLA SETA, *op. cit.*, pp. 400 f.; DUCATI, *A.E.*, pp. 400 ff.; MATTHIES, *Die Praenestinschen Spiegel* (Zur Kunstgeschichte des Auslandes 95) (1912), pp. 35-43.

(14) RICHTER, *Greek, Etruscan and Roman Bronzes* (1915), p. 77, no. 122, ill. p. 79. Museum no. 09.221.11.

ed by this method, two are in the Villa Giulia (15). Each has two round holes on a line with the centre in the positions corresponding to the ends of bars upon which figures stood. One has, in addition, four small holes near the centre; these may have served to attach a ring at the centre or a plaque under the handle, or both, as on the cover in Baltimore.

Wood cist covers, then, had handles in the form of two standing or wrestling figures, a tumbler, or two warriors carrying a comrade — all the types usual on bronze covers. They date from the early fifth century down to Hellenistic times. The handles were attached by long perforated lugs or by nails. The bodies were of perforated bronze, backed with wood. It is probable that if we could remove handles generally from their museum mountings we would find many with the lugs or nails, showing that they belonged to this type of cist.

From northern and southern Italy, far away from Praeneste, in the late period we note the use of figure handles similar to the Praenestine, especially similar to the wrestler handle in Baltimore. Two pair of wrestlers are on the shoulder of a water tank from Pompeii. Pernice decided that they were in their original positions and, because of their caps and fine workmanship, Greek (16). The men of each group face each other and link opposite arms with one another; the backs of their heads touch. With our cover in view, it is not certain that the water tank is Greek. A group of basins, some from southern Italy, shows a further use of figure handles of the Praenestine type (17). The wrestlers or warriors are in the same position as those of the water tank, except that the pairs of feet are far apart, so that the men lie nearly horizontal. From the other end of Italy, from the Gallic cemetery at Filottrano, comes a similar basin with warriors of two-dimensional style as handles (18). We do not find bronze cists in these areas but the

(15) DELLA SETA, *op. cit.*, p. 471 no. 15707 and p. 472 no. 15707.

(16) PERNICE, *Die Hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji* (Gefässe und Geräte aus Bronze) (1925), pp. 30-33, fig. 44 and Pl. VII; LAMB, *Greek and Roman Bronzes* (1929), Pl. LXXXI.

(17) PERNICE, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37, Pl. IX; MARCONI, *Dedalo*, XIII (1933), pp. 270-273.

(18) *IBID.*, pp. 272-3; DALL'OSSO, *Guida illustrata del Museo Nazionale di Ancona* (1915), pp. 244-245.

connection between these basin handles and Praenestine handles may well be by way of wood cists exported from Praeneste.

The cist cover in the Walters Art Gallery therefore serves as a centre for identifying a large group of Praenestine wood covers, of all periods, and by the stylistic connection of its handle with those of northern and southern Italy, as a hint of export of wood covers from Praeneste.

D. K. Hill



1 - BALTIMORE - WALTERS ART GALLERY — Wood cist cover with handle. Front



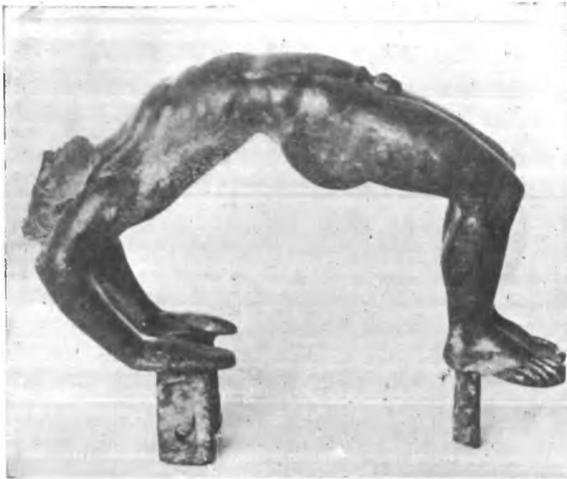
2 - BALTIMORE - WALTERS ART GALLERY — Wood cist cover with handle. Back



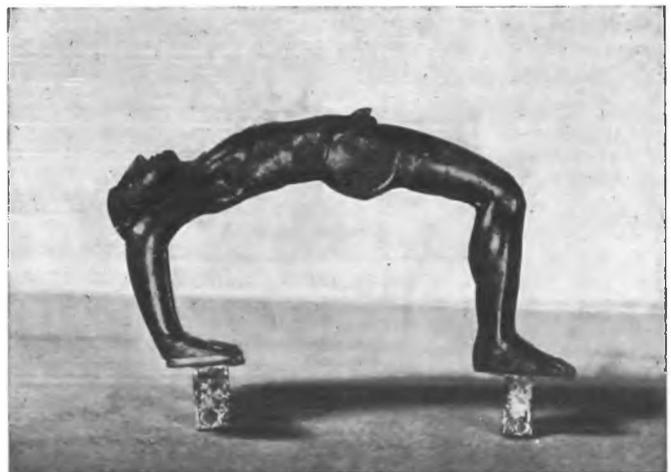
1 - BALTIMORE - WALTERS ART GALLERY — Wood cist cover with bronze handle. Top



2 - BALTIMORE - WALTERS ART GALLERY — Wood cist cover with bronze handle. Bottom



1 - NEW YORK - METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART — Handle from wood cist cover



2 - BALTIMORE - WALTERS ART GALLERY — Handle from wood cist cover



3 - NEW YORK - METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART — Handle from wood cist cover