

TERRA-COTTA RELIEFS FROM PRAENESTE

(Con le tavv. XXVII-XXIX f. t.)

In 1877, E. Fernique excavated in the cemeteries at Praeneste and the following year reported his results in the *Revue Archéologique*, mentioning terra-cottas similar to some from Praeneste already known in the Barberini Collection. He had just completed his authoritative *Étude sur Préneste, Ville de Latium* in which he listed finds from Praeneste up to 1876 but which did not appear until 1880 (1). By this historical accident Fernique's latest discovery was omitted (except for a few obvious brief insertions) from his own book which readers assumed to be complete up to the date of publication. In the 1878 report Fernique had specifically mentioned reliefs of semicircular form decorated with two pairs of horses supported above amphoras with a lion's mask between and also two of conical form with the rape of Ganymede (2). These descriptions apply to, and only to, two pairs of terra-cotta reliefs in the Walters Art Gallery (*tavv. XXVII a-b*); they were part of the collection of Don Marcello Massarenti of Rome, purchased as a whole by Henry Walters in 1902 (3). *Tav. XXVII a* shows the two semicircular reliefs with the four horses (4); they are made of reddish clay coated with a white slip with details painted in red and yellow and they would fit half way around a pole .13-.14 m. in diameter. Ten holes in each relief were for fastening to such a background. *Tav. XXVII b* (5) shows the two Ganymede reliefs which might be described as conical; they are pointed at the bottom and curved to fit one third of the way around a circular pole .11 m. in diameter. The material is again reddish clay with white slip and traces of pink remain on the bodies. Obviously, the pair were constructed from

(1) E. FERNIQUE, *Étude sur Préneste, Ville de Latium* («Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome» 17), Paris 1880. He makes scanty reference to his latest finds on p. 212, item 213.

(2) E. FERNIQUE, *RA* 1878, pt. 1, p. 237, nos. 4, 5.

(3) U. and M. P., *Catalogue du musée de peinture, sculpture et archéologie au Palais Accoramboni* II, Rome 1897, p. 58, no. 259.

(4) Walters Art Gallery 48.338 and 48.339. Certain of the hooves repaired, some missing. Height 12 m.

(5) Walters Art Gallery 48.344 and 48.345. Height .168 m.

the same molds but the heads of boy and eagle were turned in opposite directions.

Other pieces from the find can be identified. What came to Baltimore was an extraordinary modern wooden vase covered with brown velvet — strongly suggesting that all are from one find which, according to Fernique, did have additional pieces (6). *Tav.* XXVIII shows five reliefs, two pairs and one additional (7). Below are two female heads emerging from acanthus leaves, each with long tresses and a peaked *stephane* against which wings are applied at the outer corners. Each plaque is slightly curved and has four holes for attachment. Above, left and right, are two examples of a woman wearing a low, flat *stephane* and a belted *peplos*, the edge of its *apoptygma* drawn to the sides by her hands so as to resemble leaves above the three acanthus leaves, pointed downward, the substitute for her legs; each plaque has four holes. Above, center, is an uncrowned head emerging from three acanthus leaves; no perforations. *Tav.* XXIX *a-b* are a pair made from one set of molds with heads turned in opposite directions (8); a woman terminated below the knees as if rising from the earth or from the sea extends her arms sidewise with drapery winding around her arms and crossing her back. A single hole at knee level was for attachment to a flat surface. Finally, *tav.* XXIX *c*, there are three flat pieces of low relief: a pair with a woman's figure bending in opposite directions, a scarf gripped by her hands and passing behind her, having in one case three, in the other four holes, and a fragmentary relief with a male figure with drapery and staff (9).

It is not difficult to spot parallel pieces to all these among the famous objects of the Barberini Collection. Numerous small pieces, described though rarely illustrated, correspond to our *tavv.* XXVIII-XXIX *a-c* (10). Others have close similarity in form or in form and subject. Parallels for semicircular reliefs with horses are two types; in one case, six horses prance above two amphoras between which two Erotes play musical instruments; in the other,

(6) Actually, entry 259 of U. and M.P.'s catalogue says 16 pieces but the mount showed no sign of anything's being removed. I think fourteen is correct.

(7) Top row, Walters Art Gallery 48.347, 48.348, 48.346; below, Walters Art Gallery 48.343, 48.342. All five illustrated in *Arch. Esp.* A. XXV, 1952, p. 216, fig. 3; the two heads below, also by H. JUCKER, in *Das Bildnis im Blätterkelch* 1961, p. 164, fig. 49.

(8) *Tav.* XXIX *a*, Walters Art Gallery 48.340; *tav.* XXIX *b*, Walters Art Gallery 48.341. Height of *a*, .102 m.; height of *b*, slightly broken, .098 m.

(9) *Tav.* XXIX *c*, left, Walters Art Gallery 48.351, broken, height 0.5 m.; right, above, Walters Art Gallery 48.350, height .0.5 m.; below, 48.349, height .0.53.

(10) A. DELLA SETA, *Museo di Villa Giulia*, Rome 1918, p. 466-468; FERNIQUE, *Étude sur Préneste, cit.*, pp. 212 f.; Rome, Antiquarium Comunale, *Roma Medio-Repubblicana*, Rome 1973, p. 294.

four horses are rearing above two amphoras separated by a single musical Eros (11). And similar to the Ganymede reliefs are several of conical form decorated with a mounted Amazon triumphing over a warrior with variations of direction and of « costume » (12). Other comparable pieces were found recently in a chamber tomb near the Via San Stefano Rotondo in Rome (13). Two semicircular plaques are adorned with very high reliefs: a Nike drives a chariot straight forward over a Triton with two snake-formed legs, while the four horses part to the sides. Two cone-shaped plaques have in extremely high relief a winged warrior wearing a helmet. And a single relief with curved background has a female head emerging from three acanthus leaves.

The third discovery of material so similar does something to reinforce the theory that these terra-cotta reliefs are of local manufacture — by no means the only theory that has been expressed. More important, perhaps, is the light thrown upon a possible use for the reliefs. Three sets, so exactly alike — one begins to suspect a practical purpose. One theory advanced as long ago as the first discovery of such detached and perforated reliefs, seems to me quite impossible: that the plaques were to be attached to large vases of a type well known at Canosa (14). Massarenti's restorer believed this when he made the wood and velvet vase! The fact that the reliefs are fired mitigates against this theory; it would be impossible to incorporate them into the soft body of an unfinished vase. Della Seta (15) thought the reliefs came from furniture, and since the Roman reliefs were found in a tomb and the Baltimore ones in a cemetery, I suspect they belonged to funerary furniture. What about wood couches as biers, the round reliefs fitted on the turned legs, the flat ones on the plain horizontal members, the whole reproducing in cheap material bronze or bone couches of South Italy?

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(11) DELLA SETA, *Museo di Villa Giulia, cit.*, pp. 169 f., nos. 13452, 13453, 13454; *Roma Medio Repubblicana, cit.*, pp. 292 f., nos. 429 f., pl. XCIII; P. ROMANELLI, *Palestrina* 1967, p. 89, pl. XLIII.

(12) DELLA SETA, *Museo di Villa Giulia, cit.*, p. 469, nos. 13448-13451; *Roma Medio Repubblicana, cit.*, p. 293, no. 431.

(13) Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, 190656-190661. *Roma Medio Repubblicana, cit.*, pp. 241 ff., pls. LIII-LV; *AA* 1973, pp. 528 ff., figs. 4, 5; *B. Comm. Arch.* LXXXI, 1972, pp. 17 ff., pls. XVI f., and color plate.

(14) For example BIENKOWSKI, *Les celtes dans les arts mineurs*, 1928, pp. 101 f.; G. M. A. RICHTER, *BMM*, 1913, pp. 175 f.

(15) DELLA SETA, *Museo di Villa Giulia, cit.*, p. 469, « Rivestimento di piede di mobile o simile ».



a



b

Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery: *a*) 48.338, 48.339; *b*) 48.344, 48.345.



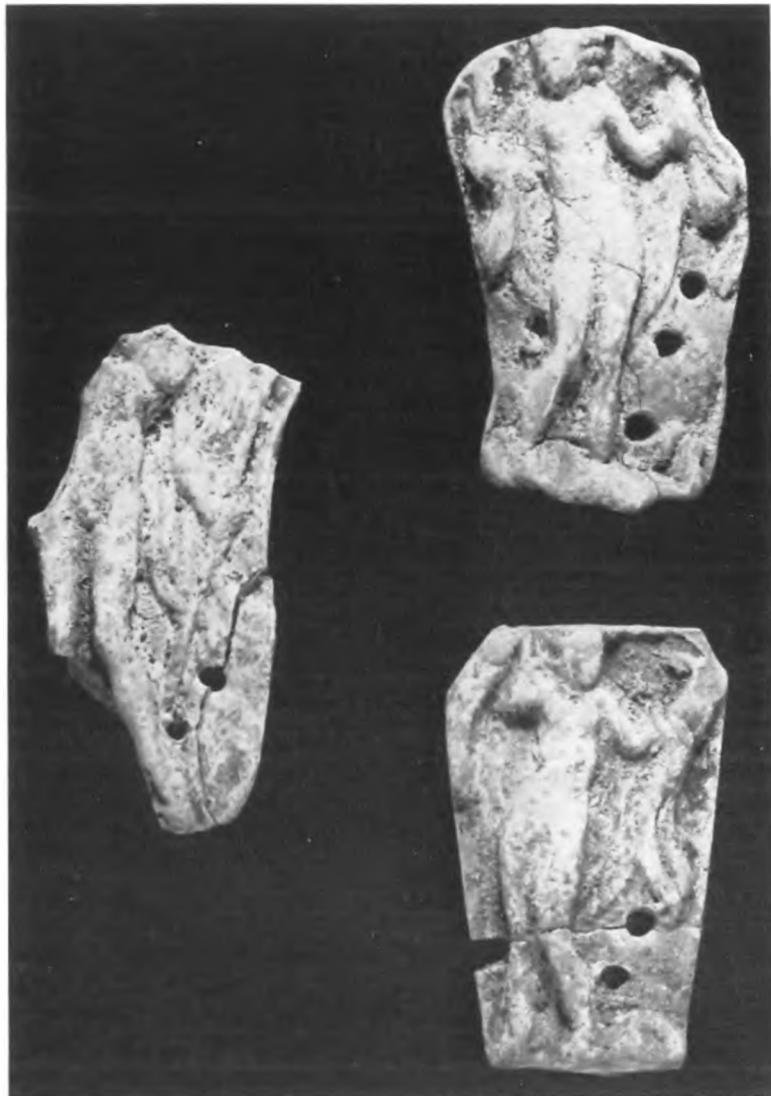
Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery 48.342, 48.343, 48.346-348.



a



b



c