

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE TERRACOTTA SCULPTURES FROM THE SANCTUARY AT I FUCOLI NEAR CHIANCIANO TERME

(Con le tavv. XIX-XXIII f.t.)

The excavation in 1986 of a sanctuary at I Fucoli, near a thermal spring of the same name in the valley of the Astrone, brought to light many fragments of the terracotta pediment and sima of a temple with exquisitely modelled figures in high relief, dated to the middle of the second century B.C. Some fragments of the right hand side of the pediment and sima could be reassembled in their proper order and are now exhibited in the fine Museo Civico Archeologico of Chianciano Terme (*tav. XIX*). Their present disposition high up on the wall gives a good impression of their original position, but does not allow close inspection¹. However, before the creation of museum, the fragments were temporarily visible at ground level in a repository in Old Chianciano, where I was able to study them at close quarters. To make these important sculptures of the Hellenistic period more accessible I shall here condense the excavator's accurate description of the remains and their interpretation, published in two articles², while adding observations of my own.

Three panels of the originally closed pediment are largely preserved: two adjoining ones on the right and a single one nearer the centre (*tav. XX a*). The two near the right hand corner show a large crater, perched precariously on rocky ground with a garland draped below. Next to it on the left sits a male figure, turned to the right and dressed in oriental fashion with trousers, long-sleeved tunic and a Phrygian cap on his head. He claps both hands round his bent left knee, while his right leg is stretched out on the rocks. Divided by a gap, the single panel shows a fragmentary male figure with bare torso and a mantle draped round his lower body, seated on a throne (*tav. XX b*).

Of the rest of the pediment all that remains are many individual fragments of further figures, amongst them a head of Herakles (*tav. XXI a*) with the lion-head covering his hair, a bearded head (*tav. XXI b*), the right flank of an anatomical cuirass, a draped

I am greatly indebted to Giulio Paolucci for his generosity in providing the images of *tavv. XIX-XXII*, and to Judith Swaddling for those of *tav. XXIII* (Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

¹ See figure on page 104 in Guide 6 of the Fondazione Musei Senesi, *Chianciano Terme. Museo Civico Archeologico*, Cinisello Balsamo 2008.

² A. RASTRELLI, *La decorazione fittile dell'edificio sacro in località I Fucoli presso Chianciano Terme*, in *Ostraka II* 2, 1993, pp. 351-367, pl. 5; EAD., *Scavi e scoperte nel territorio di Chianciano Terme: l'edificio sacro dei Fucoli*, in *Atti Chianciano*, pp. 463-476.

arm, etc. The head of Herakles with its dramatic twist, deep-set eyes and furrowed brow is clearly influenced by the style of Pergamene sculptures. The raking sima above the pediment was decorated with a marine *thiasos*, consisting of groups of real and mythical sea-creatures: a *ketos* and sea-panther, ridden by Nereids (*tav. XXI c-d*), one with her body and head enveloped completely in a large mantle, another in a flowing skirt, belted below her bare breasts. Wreathed putti recline on the backs of dolphins (*tav. XXII a*).

The right hand corner of the sima ends in a large pinecone, a characteristic tip of the *thyrsos*, the bacchic wand (*tav. XXII b*). Above this rises, forming the corner acroterion, the sensitively modelled, naked figure of a beautiful female spirit, flying diagonally to the right with spread wings, while turning her head back to the left. A large mantle is loosely draped over her left leg and slung over her left forearm. In her left hand she holds a kantharos. Her right hand, with open palm and spread-out thumb, is held next to the right side of her head; the forefingers are missing and only the thumb touches her hair. Its wavy tresses are held by a half diadem, ending in a spiral and a small wing above her left ear. She wears earrings of disc-shape with a drop pendant, plain armllets, a necklace with numerous bud-shaped pendants and a chain, draped like a bandolier across her torso, from which loops with further pendants are suspended. On her feet she wears soft, laced, ankle-length boots.

The figures of the sima, the acroterion and the plaques of the pediment were fixed to the wooden architecture with iron nails and lead, the holes for which are visible, irregularly spaced, in all of them.

The fragmentary state of the pediments, of which only a small part of the right hand side survives, does not allow us to form a coherent interpretation of its theme. The only clearly identifiable head is that of Herakles whose presence and that of the male in oriental dress has suggested to the excavator that events in the story of the Argonauts might have been represented³. My own contribution to the identification of the acroterion was published in 2000⁴, where I pointed out that the diadem of the winged figure connects it closely with a group of small, portable bronze vessels in the form of a female head with similar winged diadem (*tav. XXIII a*)⁵, some of which are jointed back to back to the head of a silenus crowned with ivy-corymbs (*tav. XXIII b*). In another example the female head, like the silenus at her back, has an ivy wreath and ribbon on her hair, which clearly identifies both of them as followers of Dionysus (*tav. XXIII c*). An interesting variant of these bronze head-vases is provided by one showing the head of a woman wearing a diadem, earrings and a torque round her neck, backed by the head of a youth. Both are joined by a hood that envelopes head and neck (*tav. XXIII d*). This recalls the Nereid from the sima of the temple riding a *ketos*, whose head and body are completely wrapped in a large cloak (*tav. XXI c*).

A striking parallel for such a closely enveloped head is found on a column krater in Berlin, belonging to a group of vases, known as *kelebai*, which were made at Vol-

³ RASTRELLI, *Scavi e scoperte nel territorio di Chianciano Terme, cit.*, pp. 468-469.

⁴ S. HAYNES, *Etruscan Civilization. A Cultural History*, London 2000, pp. 343-345.

⁵ S. HAYNES - H. MENZEL, *Etruskische Bronzekopfgefäße*, in *JahrbZentrMusMainz* VI, 1959, pp. 110-127.

terra and often served as ash-urns⁶. The veiled look of this woman's head has led to the vase-painter being called Painter of the Nun⁷. Numerous examples of such *kelebai* show representations of male and female figures, carrying *thyrsos*, characterising them as initiates into the Dionysiac mysteries.

An article in *Studi Etruschi* LXXI, 2005⁸, which appeared after my publication (and has found an echo in the catalogue of the Museo Civico of Chianciano Terme in 2008⁹), ignores all the elements of the unmistakable Dionysiac nature of the terracottas from I Fucoli and suggests that the acroterion represents Thesan/Aurora. The authoress misdescribes the figure in significant details, which may be due to the fact that she did not have the advantage of a close-up view. As she builds wide-ranging theories on her inaccurate observations, it will be useful to point out what is actually preserved. She calls the kantharos held by the winged figure a *kyathos*, from which the so-called Thesan pours down dew-drops, which, she presumes, were represented by glass, fitted into the nail-holes. Even if there were any evidence for the use of glass in such a context, the nail-holes (most clearly visible in their original place in a photo taken before the mounting on the wall of the museum, *tav.* XXII c), are not placed below the kantharos, but well away to the left and above the vessel and could thus not have represented drops issuing from its mouth.

The gesture of the right hand of the winged figure is described as shading her eyes with bent fingers from glare of Usil, the sun-god, who, it is claimed, was represented in the centre of the pediment. However, the stretched out, open palm of the hand beside the head is well away from the eyes and could not have shaded them. The gesture of *apokopein*, which the authoress invokes, is, as Ines Jucker has shown¹⁰, intimately connected with the epiphany of Dionysos. The gesture has been more correctly described by the excavator as one of surprise and alarm¹¹. The figure's deep-set eyes too, fixed with a backward glance, suggest a reaction to some awesome event that might have been shown in the centre of the pediment.

To support her theory, Erika Simon suggests that a figure of Selene must have appeared as the left acroterion, but no trace of either Usil or Selene exists. As further proof of her argument she has explained the wreathed putti, riding the waves on dolphins in the marine *thiasos*, as personifications of stars in the sky, leaving the female figures unexplained¹².

⁶ M. MONTAGNA PASQUINUCCI, *Le kelebai volterrane*, Firenze 1968, p. 67, figs. 60, 61.

⁷ For best photos see: T. DOHRN, *Zur Geschichte des italisch-etruskischen Porträts*, in *RM* LII, 1937, pl. 27, 2.

⁸ E. SIMON, *Thesan-Aurora. Zur Deutung des Akroters von Chianciano Terme*, in *StEtr* LXXI, 2005 [2007], pp. 47-57.

⁹ See note 1, pp. 100, 101.

¹⁰ I. JUCKER, *Der Gestus des Apokopein. Ein Beitrag zur Gebärdensprache in der antiken Kunst*, Zürich 1956, pp. 25, 27.

¹¹ RASTRELLI, *La decorazione fittile dell'edificio sacro in località I Fucoli*, *cit.* (see note 2), p. 362: «la mano destra accostata al volto in un gesto di sorpresa o di allarme e un kantharos nella sinistra».

¹² SIMON, *cit.* (see note 8), p. 50, pl. XX a.

The head with the lion's skin that represents Herakles, is seen by Erika Simon as that of Aita, the god of the Underworld, wearing a wolf's head cap¹³. However, in the rare depictions of Aita, such as in the wall-paintings of the Tomba dell'Orco 2 at Tarquinia¹⁴ and the Tomba Golini I near Orvieto¹⁵, he appears in calm majesty, while the tortured features and violent twist of the head of Herakles express the hero's life full of labours and trials.

In trying to make better sense of the surviving fragments of the terracottas, I refer to an interesting article on the imagery of Volterranean *kelebai* which served as ash-urns¹⁶. Here Mauro Cristofani identified male and female figures painted on them, holding *thyrsos* and sometimes accompanied by satyrs, as followers of Dionysos. The *mystai* and *bakchoi* who, still wrapped in human clothes at the beginning of their journey, have shed their garments to finally enter the blissful realm of the god.

We have already drawn attention to the tightly wrapped head by the Painter of the Nun¹⁷, which closely resembles the similarly enveloped female figure riding on a *ketos* in the marine *thiasos* of the *sima* (*tav. XXI c*). The other female, by contrast, rides bare-breasted (*tav. XXI d*). It is tempting to see in them the *mystai* on their journey across the ocean towards integration into the world of Dionysus. Imaginative and learned as the theories of Erika Simon are, we are on safer ground with an interpretation that is based on exact observation of extant remains. A. Rastrelli's suggestion that the sanctuary at I Fucoli was dedicated to the healing waters of the nearby spring is very persuasive, for three of the thermal springs of the region of Chianciano Terme show evidence of cult in antiquity¹⁸. Herakles' connection with springs is attested elsewhere in Etruria¹⁹, and widely represented in art²⁰.

The clear Dionysiac elements in the temple's terracotta figures may allude to Herakles' victory over death and achievement of Dionysiac felicity in the land of the blessed²¹.

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¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

¹⁴ See I. KRAUSKOPF, *Gods and demons in the Etruscan pantheon*, in J. MACINTOSHI TUREA (ed.), *The Etruscan World*, London-New York 2013, fig. 25.13.

¹⁵ See S. SYEINGRÄBER, *Etruscan Painting*, New York 1986, p. 279.

¹⁶ M. CRISTOFANI, *Mystai kai bakchoi. Riti di passaggio nei crateri volterrani*, in *Prospettiva* 80, 1995, pp. 2-14.

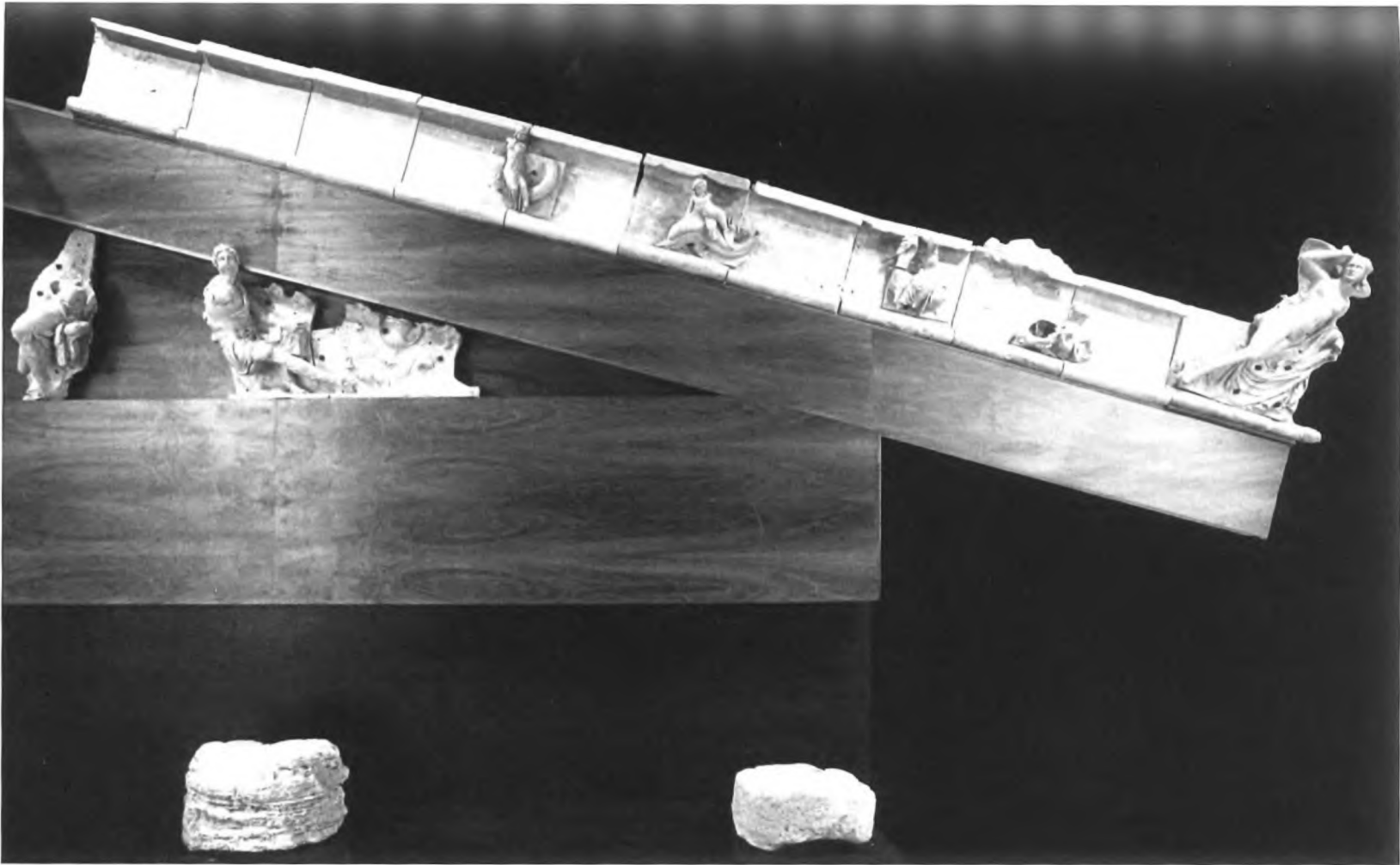
¹⁷ See notes 6 and 7.

¹⁸ RASTRELLI, *La decorazione fittile dell'edificio sacro in località I Fucoli*, *cit.* (see note 2), p. 365.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 365, note 64; p. 366, notes 65, 67.

²⁰ LIMC V (1990), pp. 207-209 (81-97) (S. J. SCHWARZ).

²¹ RASTRELLI, *La decorazione fittile dell'edificio sacro in località I Fucoli*, *cit.* (see note 2), p. 365.



Remains of pediment and sima of the sanctuary of I Fucoli in the Museo Civico Archeologico of Chianciano Terme.



a

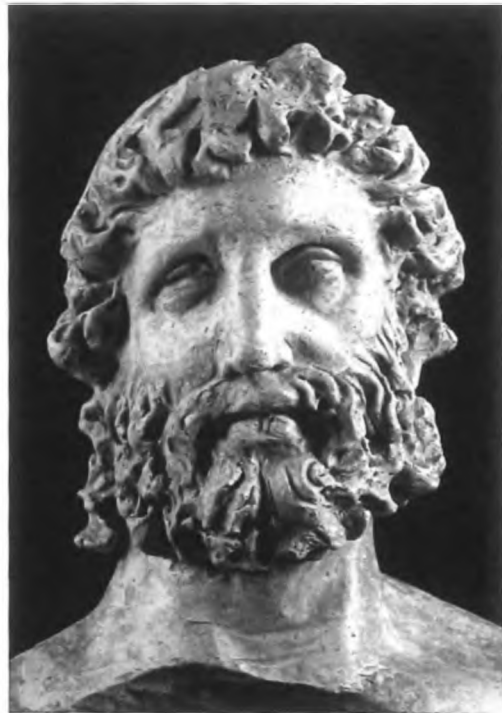


b

Details of pediment. *a*) Seated Oriental and krater;
b) Draped man seated on throne.



a



b



c



d

a) Detail of pediment. Herakles with lion's skin cap; b) Detail of pediment. Bearded head; c) Detail of sima. Nereid wrapped in mantel riding a *ketos*; d) Detail of sima. Barebreasted Nereid riding a marine panther.



a



b



c

a) Detail of sima. Wreathed putto on a dolphin; b) Acroterion. Winged female spirit above *thyrsos*; c) Same as b, showing nailholes for attaching to wooden structure.



a



b



c



d

Bronze head-vases in the British Museum. a) Walters Catalogue 759; b) Walters Catalogue 756; c) Walters catalogue 758; d) Walters Catalogue 769.