Imitation and Creation: Development of Early Bucchero Design at Cerveteri in the Seventh Century B.C by W. Regter
Review by: Jeffrey A. Becker
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Any volume published in honour of a scholar reflects their varied interests. This one is no exception. Ellen Macnamara held a post in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum, from where she interacted with and influenced the academic study of the objects she was concerned with at the BM, as well as the wider study of aspects of the archaeology of Italy and particularly of Etruria. In this volume, she is honoured with papers written by twenty-seven academics. The volume opens with Bietti Sestieri’s discussion of the intersection of archaeological data and literary texts in the period of proto-history, focusing on Carandini’s La nascita di Roma, Torelli’s Il rito, il mito e l’immagine, and E. Peruzzi, Civilità greca nel Lazio preromano. The strong critique of major players in the field, who utilize archaeological material for the presentation of history, is an excellent polemical read. She rightly dispenses with their evolutionary perspectives, the disregard for archaeological context, and the generation of narratives that are text-driven to explain the proto-historic period of the tenth to sixth centuries B.C.

There is much in the volume to alter the reader’s perspective of proto-historic Italy. Snodgrass presents a view of the peninsula not from Rome or Etruria, but instead from the Sea, a theme pursued by Lo Schiavo, in discussing Nuragic boats from Sardinia, and by Salskov Roberts, on the Capena boat. Ridgway revisits his ‘first Western Greeks’ to include those who were not Greek, especially Phoenicians, and the need to see indigenous traditions subsumed or expressed via hellenism; a theme that is pursued by Leighton, drawing on his revision of the chronologies of metallurgy — in short an antithesis between the indigenous peoples of Italy and the Greek ‘colonists’ does not work once the archaeology is considered.

The study of metallurgy is a focus throughout the volume. We learn from Giardino that copper was smelted in Italy as long ago as the fourth millennium B.C. and that the Gaudo daggers were forged from an alloy of copper and arsenic with a lower melting point (183 degrees C). Production technology is discussed by Albanese Procelli, in relation to stone moulds from Sicily; by Toms, in her discussion of fibulae; and by Swaddling et al., who demonstrate that mirrors were hammered rather than cast — thus ending a lengthy debate. These three papers draw on studies of the metal composition and benefit from scientific techniques of analysis; the conclusions from this work have made their argument so much stronger. Warfare is included with three papers by: Stary, documenting influence of the Near-East on Italian armour and weaponry; Small, on the use of javelins; and Herring et al., on the funerary contexts for the connection of wine, wealth, and war. The subject of art is represented with papers on tomb-painting, nude statues, and a final discussion of the role of British writers in the representation of Etruria.

All the papers in this volume are of a high standard and would withstand Bietti Sestieri’s opening critique. The affection of the many authors, both British and Italian, underlines the role that those in posts at the British Museum have in the academic study of archaeology; a role that, it is hoped, will continue in the future.

University of Reading


Regter’s study explores the development of fan-shaped decorative motifs on Caeretan bucchero pottery of the seventh century B.C. R., in general, follows the framework established by earlier bucchero studies, most notably those of Pareti (1947) and Rasmussen (1979). The main focus of R.’s research is the development of fan-shaped decoration on a range of bucchero forms, a motif that leads R. to develop an internal chronology for the classification of bucchero. R.’s proposed chronology thus departs from Rasmussen’s which relies largely upon the dating of associated Greek pottery found in Etruscan funereal contexts in order to establish dates. R.’s volume also publishes three collections of bucchero pottery in Amsterdam — that of the Allard Pierson Museum, as well as two private collections.

The basic approach in this book is a stylistic analysis of the decorative motifs found on bucchero vessels. The motifs are presented in detailed photographs that can be compared side-by-side, along with extensive notes and diagrams. Three developmental stages for the fan motif are identified: pre-programmatic, proto-programmatic, and programmatic. The earliest stage witnesses the use of composite patterns that combine incised fans with petalled rosettes, while the proto-programmatic
stage brings about the gradual regularization of the fan’s placement. The vessels in the pre-
programmatic group are identified as experimental forms, often being handmade as opposed to later
bucchero that was manufactured on the potter’s wheel. Some of these experimental forms include
apodal pieces that rest upon stands, perhaps reminiscent of Villanovan vessels that were designed to
hang from a peg. The second stage also saw the fan motif develop from an earlier motif (half
rosettes), yielding a semi-circular fan that was manufactured using an instrument with a single row
of teeth, or picked out freehand.

By the end of the second stage the fan motif has a fixed orientation with the arc of the fan
directed toward the upper, outer edge of the decorated area, demonstrating that the fan is a
decorative motif in its own right and not simply a product of horror vacui. The programmatic stage
adds horizontal fans to the vertical fans of the earlier stages; it is this stage that applies to the first
‘true bucchero’. During this programmatic stage the fan becomes predominant in the decorative
scheme, but by the end of this period the fan motif eventually falls out of usage. R. correlates the
lapse of the fan motif with a general degradation in the quality of bucchero pottery.

In studying the fan motif, R. attempts to document five ‘hands’ that seem evident in the corpus
under study, based upon the directionality and precision of tool marks. This attempt to document
various instrument groups within the production of this period does reinforce the generally held
theory that in the seventh century this material was produced at Caere and exported to other
Etruscan centres, although the alleged identification of actual individual artisans seems a risky
proposition.

The analysis of bucchero design presented by R. includes a consideration of various techniques
including filigree, granulation, repoussé, and countersunk designs. One objective is to discuss the
relationship between bucchero and metalwork vase forms. The tableware that comprises the bulk
of the bucchero corpus is divided into a high quality class that is characterized by thin walls and a black
sheen, and another class that is less carefully manufactured with a greyer sheen and thicker walls.
R. concludes that this second class of tableware is nearly mass-produced.

The presentation of the design analysis is a vehicle for R. to explicate his internal chronology.
This chronology is based upon the fan motif that is characteristic of the higher quality tableware, a
design that began as a horror vacui technique and eventually came into its own right. The
experimental group of pottery, which preceded the first category of high quality tableware in R.’s
scheme, gave rise to this design element. R. admits that this hypothesis stands counter to the
external chronology of Rasmussen which considers the experimental group to have developed over
time rather than as an antecedent to the main seventh-century forms. The external chronology also
implies that the fan decoration was copied from metal forms, while R. asserts that it developed
within the bucchero corpus. In the end, R.’s discussion of the relationship of ceramic to metal
reaches the conclusion that the fan-shaped decoration originated in bucchero and not in metal, and
that the dating of the experimental group must, by necessity, be transferred from its current date in
the third quarter of the seventh century to the middle of the first half of the seventh century b.c.
This re-dating is necessary for R. since the experimental group must precede the appearance of true
bucchero.

Despite the neatness of R.’s presentation, there are problems inherent in the approach adopted
in this study. R.’s study of bucchero design occurs here in isolation, paying little heed to other
archaeological evidence or contexts. Rasmussen’s chronology does rely on the chronology of Greek
ceramics, and while some might desire an internally articulated chronology, the consideration of
bucchero on purely stylistic grounds is perilous. The removal of pottery from an archaeological
framework disallows the validity of any proposed chronology, thus R.’s re-dating of the experimental
bucchero is unsubstantiated. Indeed R.’s approach is much in the tradition of the outmoded Meisterfrage
trend in art-historical studies, a model that runs counter to current mainstream Mediterranean studies.

In all aspects of studying the pottery, R. is meticulous and thorough, providing numerous
comparisons for the pieces and design motifs under study. There are a few drawbacks in the fluidity
of language in the volume, owing largely to difficulties in the presentation of the text in English. The
case that R. makes would undoubtedly be stronger if, in the concluding section, more attention had
been given to recent scholarship on bucchero pottery, particularly the various archaeometric studies
whose aim it has been to better understand both the physical fabric of bucchero and its methods of
production. Dates from these studies, paired with R.’s more traditional stylistic analysis, could, in
fact, make new statements about bucchero in the seventh century b.c. The appearance of R.’s study,
along with Berkin’s Orientalizing Bucchero from the Lower Building at Poggio Civitate (Murlo)
(2003) may signal a new phase of bucchero studies.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

JEFFREY A. BECKER