

I BRONZI ETRUSCHI E ITALICI DEL RÖMISCH-GERMANISCHES ZENTRALMUSEUM

BY ALESSANDRO NASO (RÖMISCH-GERMANISCHES ZENTRALMUSEUM; KATALOGE VOR- UND FRÜHGESCHICHTLICHER ALTERTÜMER 33). PP. VII + 430, FIGS. 202, PLS. 106, TABLES 3. VERLAG DES RÖMISCH-GERMANISCHEN ZENTRALMUSEUMS, MAINZ 2003. ISBN 3-88467-080-2 (CLOTH).

Museum catalogues are a staple of the archaeological diet but are also notoriously difficult to do well. To pull it off, an author must begin with an excellent and important collection, research the eclectic objects meticulously, document and analyze them scrupulously, organize them coherently, and then make the whole amorphous mass digestible. From this results a work that will be consulted by scholars for generations, a documentary record that reinvests objects that have been divested of archaeological context with some kind of cultural and contextual meaning. Naso succeeds admirably in doing all these things in his catalogue of the Etruscan and Italic bronzes in the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum.

The collection is an excellent one, although some of its documentation is incomplete because the archive was destroyed in 1942. Naso begins his study with a discussion of the collection's history, including a list of the objects destroyed, a very brief historiographic summary. While a few single objects have a known provenance, only two groups of objects have contexts of sorts. Both groups came from the art market, the first in 1960, the second as a gift to the museum in 1983. The former group consists of four objects, probably from a single male tomb of the eighth century B.C.: an axe, a spear point, an arrowhead, and an armlet. The other group is far more interesting and enigmatic. It consists of a series of bronze sheets decorated with repoussé geometric motifs in the form of zigzags and lines that form schematic, highly abstracted human faces. Naso suggests that these plaques might have been pieced together to form a cuirass and that they were part of a warrior's panoply. Their preservation may

result from their eventual use as a votive gift. They are said to be from the area around Syracuse; given the parallels cited by Naso, they are certainly Sicilian. They have already been published, in 1983 and 1995, therefore, despite their questionable provenance, this is not their first scholarly presentation.

The collection of bronzes is comprehensive. It includes a wide variety of armor, including swords, spear points, helmets, and other martial paraphernalia. Exceptional are an antenna sword and sword of the Capena type, with a wooden scabbard that had a bronze terminal with characteristic cut-out geometric animal decoration (cat. 183), and a remarkable conical Villanovan helmet with polychrome painted decoration (cat. 204), acquired on the art market in 1971. There is the usual array of ornaments and pendants, fibulae, and belt buckles, as well as the requisite bronze figurines, many of them not of exceptional quality but a fine assortment nonetheless. More interesting to this reviewer were the bronze utensils, many of them associated with banqueting and the consumption of wine. There are ladles, funnel strainers, drinking and serving vessels, and parts thereof. A Schnabelkanne of the "plumpe Kanne" type (cat. 99) stands out, but most important are a Villanovan situla (cat. 86) bought on the Basel art market in 1986, and a spectacular anthropomorphic amphora (cat. 88), probably from Chiusi, originally from the Ancona collection. There is an excellent discussion of its possible meaning, and parallels for this usage in other parts of Etruria are cited.

Other excellent examples are a well-known thymiaterion (cat. 146) with figural scenes on the base that are interpreted as a *Hercle-Uni*

narrative; this splendid object was a gift of Napoleon III in 1861 and was originally in the Fould collection. In the same vein is a fifth-century candelabrum topped by a warrior donning a cuirass (cat. 150), which Naso convincingly attributes to a Spina workshop, and a fourth-century candelabrum terminal in the form of a pair of figures. The latter is enigmatic; the scene was interpreted as Aeneas and Anchises by Sassatelli, but the interpretation remains in question. Naso successfully traces the object's provenance to the Sarti collection in Rome.

The mirrors in the museum's collection are revisited in detail by Naso. Even though published by Ursula Höckmann in the *Corpus Speculorum Etruscorum* (BRD 1) in 1987, their inclusion here is welcome, for it is useful to have all the bronzes in a single volume. The study of Etruscan mirrors has become a specialized industry of late, and decorated mirrors have moved into a privileged place previously reserved only for figurines. At least in this volume the mirrors can be appreciated with other examples of Etruscan toreutics, and it is also useful to have yet another eye, especially one as well honed as Naso's, look over this small but important group of 12 mirrors. Of note is a second-century mirror (cat. 174) engraved with an enthroned male figure accompanied by a winged youth identified as a *genius*. This is interpreted as a genre scene connected to the afterlife, but I am not sure if genre and afterlife really belong in the same rubric, or if there really was anything like genre in the modern sense

in this type of figural representation. The enthroned figure is unusual, and the composition seems to be a harbinger of later Hellenistic–Roman compositions such as the enthroned male figure from the Boscoreale megalography. Another mirror whose authenticity has been doubted (cat. 175), because it is a close copy of a mirror in Perugia, shows *Hercle* with two other divinities. Naso considers it authentic. Another mirror (cat. 176) presents us with an enigmatic scene of two figures, one of which holds an infant. Interpretations have run the gamut from Penelope holding Telemachos to Naso's suggestion of a scene of the *Hypsipyle* of Euripides, as known from southern Italian vase painting. In this case, the identification will have to remain an open question.

It should be noted that throughout this catalogue the documentation is exceptional. Objects are described beautifully, parallels are cited in depth, and the bibliography is absolutely up-to-date. The scholarship is scrupulous and erudite. The drawings are excellent and the photography of high quality. This will be one of the first reference works to turn to for anyone researching Italic and Etruscan bronzes, and it is a book that should be part of any serious research library.

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