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Sommario

6 | *147 luglio 2017*

78 | *148 agosto 2017*

162 | *149 settembre 2017*

148

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LA RIVISTA DI ENGRAMMA N. 148

Bordignon | Centanni | Gianvittorio | Lazzarini | Lo Piparo | Mannuccia
Roberti | Spigo

DIONYSUS BEYOND BORDERS

A CURA DI GIULIA BORDIGNON E FABIO LO PIPARO

DIRETTORE
monica centanni

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SOMMARIO

- 7 | DIONYSUS BEYOND BORDERS
Giulia Bordignon, Fabio Lo Piparo
- 11 | DIONYSUS AND THE ACROBAT
Lorenzo Lazzarini, Francesco Mannuccia, Umberto Spigo
- 31 | DIONISO E L'ACROBATA
Lorenzo Lazzarini, Francesco Mannuccia, Umberto Spigo
- 49 | TORN FILLETS AND A BROKEN SCEPTRE: CASSANDRA'S COSTUME, PROPS
AND ATTRIBUTES IN ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA AND VASE-PAINTING
Fabio Lo Piparo
- 67 | CHOREUTIKA. PERFORMING AND THEORISING DANCE IN ANCIENT
GREECE
edited by Laura Gianvittorio, Fabrizio Serra Editore, Pisa-Roma
2017
- 75 | SPETTATORI: DI SPALLE, DI FRONTE ALL'INDICIBILE, SCOSSI DAL VITALE
BATTITO CARDIACO, AL RITMO DELL'ESTASI DIONISIACA
di Bruno Roberti e Monica Centanni

DIONYSUS AND THE ACROBAT
STUDY, CONSERVATION AND PROMOTION OF THE LIPARI
NECROPOLIS KALYX-KRATER

Lorenzo Lazzarini, Francesco Mannuccia, Umberto Spigo



1 | Claire Lyons, Curator of Antiquities of the Getty Museum, in front of the krater with Dionysus and the Acrobat from Lipari.



2 | Poster of the exhibition held in Los Angeles, Getty Villa, April-August 2013.

Dioniso seduto e dinnanzi a lui una acrobata nuda e due attori di commedia. [...] Ha una corona di foglie d'edera [...] e il lungo tirso che si appoggia alla spalla. La giovane acrobata [...] si esibisce in un esercizio tenendosi con le gambe all'insù, e flesse [...]. Dei due buffoni che occupano il lato destro della scena, il primo piccolo e tozzo con capelli e barba bianca e con corta *exomis* [...] si curva con le mani sulle ginocchia per ammirare più da vicino le bellezze dell'acrobata [...]. In alto da due finestrelle appaiono altri due personaggi pronti ad entrare in scena, entrambi con maschera bianca e quindi probabilmente femminili.

Dionysus seated and before him, a nude acrobat and two comedic actors. [...] He has a crown of ivy [...] and the long thyrsus he rests on his shoulder. The young acrobat [...] displays his body in exercise with her legs raised and flexed [...]. Of the two jesters who occupy the right side of the scene, the first, small and stocky, with white hair and beard and a short *exomis* [...] bends over with his hands on his knees to better admire the beauty of the acrobat [...]. Ahigh, from two small windows, another two characters appear ready to enter the scene, both with white masks, therefore probably, female.

Bernabò Brea-Cavalier 1965, 131

Thus did its discoverers, Luigi Bernabò Brea and Madeleine Cavalier, describe the main scene of this phlyax calyx-krater in *Meliguni Lipàra II*. The vase, probably by a Sicilian workshop, is part of an important group of works that underwent highly sophisticated analysis and restoration arranged by the Getty Trust of Los Angeles. The restoration project, carried out on the occasion of the exhibition “Sicily. Art and Invention between Greece and Rome” (figs. 1-2), was determined necessary for the future safeguarding of the work. As highlighted by the curators, the exhibition’s deliberate selection of 150 archeological finds intended to “shift [...] focus to the Classical and early Hellenistic periods, when Sicilian Greek achievements in art and architecture, poetry and rhetoric, philosophy and history, and mathematics and applied engineering, attained levels of refinement and ingenuity rivaling, even surpassing, anywhere in Greece” (Lyons, Bennet, 2013, 2-3). With the approval of the Sicilian Ministry of Culture and Sicilian Identity, the exhibition travelled from Los Angeles to Cleveland in 2013[1].



3 | Visitors of the 2013 Getty Villa exhibition.

Over 140,000 visitors played a vital role in the process of promoting Sicilian archaeological heritage [Fig. 3] in an initiative that was followed in

2016 by the exhibitions organized at the British Museum and the Ashmolean Museum (Booms, Higgs, 2016; AA.VV., 2016).

The three events – significant examples of cultural interaction at an international level – resulted in the development of research programs aimed at deepening the knowledge of both ‘artistic techniques’ and the impact of preservation measures from previous restorations of the single masterpieces[2]. As will be discussed in this paper, these events, far beyond the occasioning contingency, “stimulated a reappraisal of ancient Sicily’s contributions to classical culture,” a reappraisal that “can ramify in unexpected directions” (Lyons 2014, 258, 260).

The themes of promotion and conservation of cultural heritage through preparatory diagnostic processes are in line with the conceptual approach of *Pots&Plays*, a research topic of “Engramma” and the Centro Studi ClassicA at the University Iuav of Venice. In fact, the Lipari krater, “pezzo di eccezionale interesse per la storia del teatro antico” (“an object of exceptional interest for the history of theatre in antiquity”: Bernabò Brea-Cavalier 1997, 40), and its conservation issues, were granted special attention during the *Pots&Plays* seminar held in Venice on May 16, 2017 as a exchange between the Iuav and the Getty.



4 | Lipari, necropolis of Contrada Diana during the excavations of the 1950s (from Bernabò Brea, Cavalier 1965, plate XXXI).

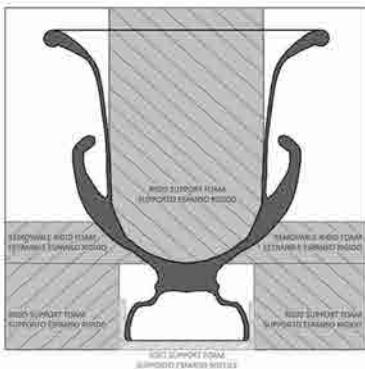
The krater was discovered in August 1954 (Bernabò Brea-Cavalier 1965, 131) in a burial cist built with unfired bricks in the Greek Lipàra necropolis of the “contrada Diana” on the island of Lipari [Fig. 4]. Evidence shows that it was used as a cinerary in the burial chamber of the necropolis (Tomb 367, excavations by the Soprintendenza alle Antichità di Syracuse curated by Luigi Bernabò Brea and Madeleine Cavalier). The uniqueness of the iconography in the figurative scenes on the main side, and the extraordinary expressive power of these scenes, have rightly placed this

masterpiece – attributed to the Group Louvre K240 (Trendall 1987, 42-66, n. 91; Bernabò Brea-Cavalier 1997, 38-46; Roscino 2012, 287-295) – among the most emblematic of the Western Greece red-figured pottery said to show the links between Dionysian devotion and the theatrical universe (Pontrandolfo 2000; Schwarzmaier 2011).



5 | Video-microscopy examination of the state of conservation of the krater.

In 2012, technological analysis were conducted on the krater with the help of video-microscopy [Fig. 5] in order to evaluate the real state of conservation before it would journey across the Atlantic for the Getty exhibition. These tests found that, for conservation purposes, it would be necessary to conduct a delicate operation that could not be carried out without dismantling the artifact itself.



6 | Packaging design for the krater proposed by the Getty.

Despite being protected by the packaging especially designed by the Getty's technicians for the physical transfer of the object [Fig. 6], the risk of collapse of the walls appeared more than likely, due to the poor state of preservation of the shellac used in the 1960s as an adhesive to assemble the 48 fragments composing the vase.

Faced with the understandable refusal of the Museum of Lipari to allow the krater to be handled due its precarious conditions, the Getty Museum offered to take the financial charge for a radical updated restoration, what could be called a 'trial' intervention for the consequences it is expected to have on the more general conservation of the vascular and coroplastic heritage of ancient Sicily[3].



7 | Ancient lead 'puntature' on an Attic krater from the necropolis of Lipari, Museo Archeologico Regionale "Luigi Bernabò Brea", room XXI.

In our case, the main conservation question involved has proved to be the decision to use shellac in earlier restorations: its ageing involves vitrification and subsequent loss of adhesivity. The phenomenon unfortunately affects most of the artifacts in the display cases of the most important Sicilian archaeological museums (Siracusa, Palermo, Gela and Lipari). At the time of the Getty exhibition, no experiments had yet been made to resolve this problem.

It should be emphasized that this natural polymer, whose application in the restoration of archaeological ceramics dates back to the nineteenth century (Thiaucourt 1865, 9-13), was still in use in mid-century among conservators employed by the Sicilian Archeological Superintendencies

like that of Syracuse. The maintenance restoration of pottery is documented in Sicily (and elsewhere) in numerous examples of the practice called “puntatura” in Italian, which consisted in using a bow drill to make holes in the terracotta inside of which were inserted metal staples or wires that, in the earliest cases, it is assumed were of organic matter (Ris Paquot 1876) [Fig. 7]. There is evidence of this technique from as early as prehistory to the early twentieth century “conciabrocche” character, Zi’ Dima Licasi, in Luigi Pirandello’s short story *The Jar* (1909) who struggles to make Don Lollò accept the validity of the “mastice miracoloso, di cui serbava gelosamente il segreto” (“miraculous glue he kept as a jealously guarded secret”).



8 | Micrographs of the detachments in the krater.

Close examination detected not only the macroscopic separation of glued fragments [Fig. 8], but also showed the chalice was tilted a few degrees with respect to the vertical line of its foot.



9 | Basin for exposure of the fragments to alcohol vapors ('Pettenkofer system').

Following a precise plan for dismantling the vase, its disassembly was possible thanks to an experimental approach based on the 'Pettenkofer

system'. This method was developed by the German chemist Max Joseph von Pettenkofer in the mid-nineteenth century for a very different purpose (Secco Suardo 19274, 407-421; Piva 19722, 181-187): it used alcohol vapors to 'rejuvenate' weathered varnishes and restore legibility to oil paintings. Making use of its chemical-physical principles, it is possible to force aged shellac to swell, allowing its removal [Figg. 9-10].



10 | Scalpel removing swollen shellac used in previous restorations.



11 | Dismantled fragments of the the crater's lip.

Due to the complex articulation of the crack pattern, it was necessary to develop a strategy for the reassembly that proceeded by separate sections [Fig. 11]. Adhesives with different characteristics (Agnini-Lega 1999; Castro-Domenech 1999, 114-131) were employed to glue together the fragments of the various registers of the crater, to provide a proper solution to the specific need of the lip, the figured zone and its concave lower wall, on one side, and to secure its foot on the other side. Fortunately, the section corresponding to the crater's vertical wall comprised a single large fragment, a sort of continuous cylinder.

This made it possible to achieve a perfect bond among 48 fragments [Fig. 12], an indispensable prerequisite that guaranteed structural stability to the reassembled krater. It also restored the vertical axis of radial symmetry that had been deformed by a considerable thickness of shellac at the attachment of the foot to the belly, leading to noticeable misalignment [Fig. 13].



12 | The phase of gluing fragments following a precise reassembly strategy.



13 | 3D scanning ('Mephisto system').

Cleaning was conducted both mechanically with scalpels and other precision tools [Fig. 14], and chemically with ionic-exchange resins (Pedeli-Appolonia 1998; Cremonesi 2001). The cleaning process aimed at the elimination or reduction of all disturbing additions, including calcareous

incrustations and the brownish gum arabic that obscured figurations [Fig. 15]. The coloration was later brightened with final protective treatments.



14 | Chemical cleaning with ionic-exchange resins.



15 | The profile of Dionysus before and after the removal of calcareous incrustation and altered gum arabic.



16 | Top-view of the krater with recognisable fillings and integrations.

To restore material continuity and formal integrity to the work, the *lacunae* in the ceramic body – which in many cases involved the entire thickness – have been reconfigured [Fig. 16] with fillings and integrations in accordance with the principle of recognisability (Bandini 1992, 223-230; Pedeli-Appolonia 1994, 131-17).

Laboratory analysis – preliminary to identifying the most appropriate restoration methods – could prove an exciting starting point for developing interesting hypotheses for interdisciplinary work. Archaeometrical analyses crossed with the characterization of both the original clays used for the ceramic body and its decorative handles, as well as its original pigments, may generate new data on the production areas and markets of

the large groups of vase painters active in the late classical age between Sicily and southern Tyrrhenian Italy. This group of artists is referred to as the “Sicilian forerunners” and, in the classifications established by Arthur Dale Trendall, is described as being active during “the transition from Sicilian to Paestan school” (Trendall 1987, 22-56; Denoyelle-Iozzo 2009, 166-170, 181-183), a period which also includes the Group Louvre K240 (Trendall 1987, 42-46; Denoyelle-Iozzo 2009, 181-183; Denoyelle 2012, 32, 66-76).

An expansion of the project that is in the process of being drafted will add other analyses requested to the LAMA laboratory by the Getty, so as to compare the ceramic body of our vase with that of the Getty Museum’s calyx-krater attributed by Trendall to the same Group Louvre K240 (Trendall 1987, 46, n.101; Bernabò Brea-Cavalier 1997, 38-46; Roscino 2012, 287-295). The so-called ‘Fleischman proto-Paestan krater’ is decorated with a scene depicting a Dionysian dance in which the god himself participates in the guise of a lyrist, and Eros is carried on the shoulder of a Silenus playing the *aulos*. The presence of an old *phlyax* with two torches makes reference to the world of theater [Fig. 17].



17 | The so-called ‘Fleischman Krater’ preserved at the Getty.



18 | Packaging of the krater in Lipari for the transfer to the Getty Museum in 2013.

The restoration was thus not only important for having averted the significant risk that could have been incurred by the handling of the archaeological find [Fig. 18]. Representing the restoration project in such a manner would undermine the importance of the Getty Museum's initiative, interpreting it as an undertaking carried out merely to attain the loan of a masterpiece whose absence would have affected the attractions at the museum's exhibition.

Instead, its positive effects must be evaluated and read as an example of the fruits of a cosmopolitan policy of openness to interchange between institutions that has long been practiced by the Getty Trust with the aim of increasing knowledge while enhancing cultural heritage, all in the context of great exhibitions organized upon solid scientific grounding.

This conservation project offers an opportunity for comparative analysis of technical and stylistic data, as well as of iconographic heritage and its ideological substrate, not only with the Phlyax vases categorised under the Group Louvre K240 but with other important pieces as well: from the eponymous 'Louvre bell-krater' exhibited in the French museum [Fig. 19] and the three Lipari calyx-kraters of various Dionysian themes - the figurations in at least two of them (from tombs 921 and 974) show clear references to the world of theater, though through different indicators [Fig. 20] - to the calyx-kraters of the Getty Museum (Trendall 1987, 96, n. 101; Green 2012, 322-339, n. 55), the krater of Taranto (Trendall 1987, 46, n. 100) and the rhyton from Syracuse (Trendall 1987, 47, n. 103).



19 | The eponymous krater of the Group Louvre K240, Paris, Musée du Louvre.



20 | The showcase of the Museo Archeologico Eoliano "Luigi Bernabò Brea" (room XXI) with the kraters of the Group Louvre K240.



21 | Side A of the krater with Dionysus and the Acrobat.

In fact, the return of legibility in drawing and color values also serves as an effective 'medium' towards a more complete appreciation of the expressive complex inscribed on the artefact's surface, the significance of which is inseparable from the technical expertise of the vase painter, based as it is on the interaction between descriptive elements borrowed from the theatre and the metaphor of the centrality of Dionysus and his multifaceted cultural universe [Fig. 21]. It is thus that interpretative readings like those of J. Richard Green are given force, successfully capturing the 'key point' of the figuration as found "in the ambiguity between the actuality of performance and the further reality involving the god's presence" (Green 2012, 321-323).

However, a more pointed attention to the role of this Group in the diffusion of iconographic solutions and stylistic accents in the Tyrrhenian area – in specific, around the actual configuration of relationships among these in the early productive phases of the Paestan workshop, particularly in the work of Assteas – requires broader knowledge of contextual data (both thanks to desirable new excavation acquisitions as well as through the revision of old discoveries) for the purposes of chronological framing.

At the moment, associations with the forms of black-glazed ware that are present in the four Liparote funerary chests would point to the beginning of the second quarter of the century, deviating from the dating proposed by Martine Denoyelle by at least a decade (390-380) (Denoyelle 2011, 32, 66-76).

At the same time, identification of the center (or perhaps centers) of production remains entirely open by virtue of the undoubted projections of the Tyrrhenian area between Paestum and Campania; it has at times been proposed as a plausible, though still not scientifically-supported, base location between the area of the Strait of Messina (preferably the Sicilian shore) and Lipàra (Spigo 2002, 277).

The crossed previously-mentioned archaeometric investigations could lead to the development of this theory.

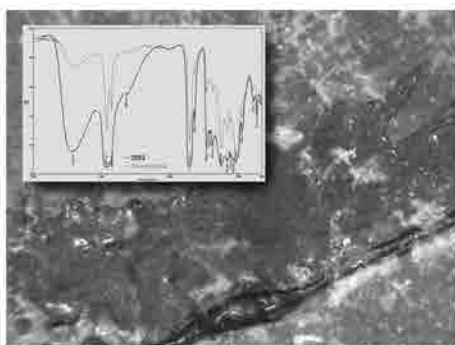
A series of laboratory analyses took advantage of the fact that during the process of ungluing pieces of the vase, a small flake of the ceramic body happened to separate from the surface, becoming irreplaceable. The analyses performed on the flake were carried out according to a programmed sequence so as to obtain the maximum of information possible from the materials constituting the krater and from the manufacturing technique followed in its execution (Cuomo di Caprio [1985] 2007; Lazzarini 2000, 283-290)[4].



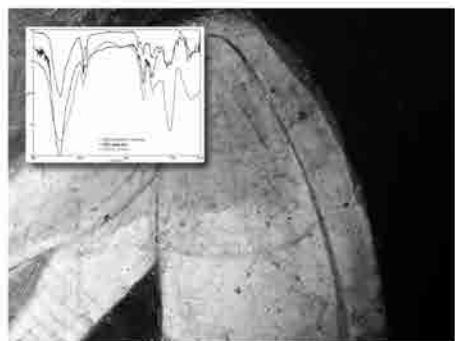
22 | Electron microscope room at the LAMA laboratory, Iuav University of Venice.

A portion of the flake was powdered in agate mortar and subjected to X-Ray diffractometric analysis (XRD). The residues of glue adhering to the flake were removed with a scalpel and subjected to a Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) [Fig. 22]. The rest of the flake was

then used for the preparation of a polished section. Upon incorporation into a cold setting polyester resin, it was later subjected to quantitative chemical analysis by means of scanning electron microscopy coupled with energy dispersive spectrometry (SEM+EDS). Finally, a thin section was formed from the glossy section and studied petrographically under a polarizing optical microscope. The results of all these analyses will be published elsewhere alongside those obtained by similar methods from the study of the sample of the aforementioned 'Fleischmann proto-Paestan Krater' sent to the LAMA laboratory by the Getty.



23 | Diffractogram of shellac and macrophoto of gluing with deburring.



24 | Diffractogram of gum arabic and macrophoto of the removal test.

Only FTIR spectra relating to the organic substances that were found on the liparote masterpiece are disclosed here. Used as adhesive and surface protection they were confirmed as shellac [Fig. 23] and gum arabic [Fig. 24].

Trendall assigned fourteen vases and fragments of varied origins (among those known, Lipari, Syracuse, Gela and Taranto) and from various museums (not exclusively Italian), to the Group Louvre K240 and later, other

researchers expanded the Group with new proposals for attribution. It is therefore hoped that this example of Italian-American collaboration in conservation will encourage other museums to submit their archaeological objects for laboratory analysis. Among these artefacts are samples of vases attributed to the Group Louvre K240 workshop as well as to other painters and to other stylistically related proto-Siceliote and proto-Paestan groups that may have operated in the same areas of production.

The key goal of current museum ethical issues cannot be separated from a policy of cultural exchange that aims at seizing opportunities offered by restoration work to deepen the scientific knowledge of works of art themselves while at the same time testing new conservation methods in a constructive sharing of ideas.

Every research project accomplished through the logic of public service should be duly divulged, overcoming prejudices and personalisms, with the aim of promoting greater awareness of cultural heritage in the communities of origin where the objects were found and in those where they are conserved and displayed. The objective is the best preservation of the finds in question, one which ensures “l’accessibilità per motivi di studio delle collezioni, della documentazione e delle conoscenze acquisite, attraverso i mezzi più opportuni per renderne partecipi il più largo numero di persone ad esse interessate” (“the accessibility, for study purposes, of collections, documentation, and knowledge acquired through the most opportune means so as to make participants in these means of the largest number of interested people”: Mibact2000, 34).

“Who Owns Antiquity?” is the question James Cuno, President of the J. Paul Getty Trust, has posed in his search for “better ways to protect antiquity”. Our hope is that the response “antiquity knows no border” (Cuno 2010, 146-147) might constitute a real incentive to overcoming barriers of any kind in favor of sustaining a supportive base and unified development amidst three indissolubly interconnected conceptual and operational pillars: new forms of knowledge, preservation and promotion (Murphy 2016)[5].

We thank the Getty Trust of Los Angeles for its kind permission to use the images presented in this paper, with the exception of figs. 4, 7, 19, 20.

NOTES

- [1] Over one third of the finds on display were borrowed from Sicilian institutions: they notwithstanding later incurred in a 'diplomatic incident' because of the "ensuing controversy, which appeared to cast doubt on the reliability of formal cultural agreements" (Lyons 2014, 255, 259, 262-263 ; Cirino 2013).
- [2] The protagonists of these exhibitions were conservation projects on exemplary artefacts, such as the facial reconfiguration of the marble Priapus from the Museo Archeologico Paolo Orsi di Siracusa, the anti-seismic support for the Mothya Youth, the restoration of the Warrior in the severe style (pediment sculpture of Parian marble) from the Archaeological Museum of Agrigento and the green marble pulpit with pre-fabricated architectural elements of a Byzantine basilica from the Marzamemi wreck.
- [3] This pioneering initiative involved numerous scholars and practitioners who formed a truly multidisciplinary task force around the krater. The restoration project and the direction of conservation work was taken up by what was then the Archaeological Park of the Aeolian Islands under the supervision of architect Michele Benfari, archaeologist Maria Clara Martinelli, and Dr. Umberto Spigo. As director of the Institute, Dr. Spigo maintained the relationship with the Getty (specifically with Claire Lyons, curator of the exhibition and the Museum's Curator of Antiquities, and with Jerry Podani who, at the time, was Senior Conservator) and proposed the archaeological restoration laboratory of the firm L'ISOLA for the conservation project. L'ISOLA was commissioned by the American museum to carry out the delicate intervention, entirely funded by the Getty. The restoration work, directed and coordinated by architect-conservator Francesco Mannuccia, was carried out in January and February 2013 by Dr. Katia D'Ignoti (art historian and technical director of the pictorial sector of L'ISOLA laboratori di restauro s.r.l.) together with the conservators Corrado Pedeli (Superintendence of Aosta) and Francesca La Sorella (Opificio delle Pietre Dure of Florence). Dr. D'Ignoti, along with Prof. Lorenzo Lazzarini, also presided over the study of manufacturing techniques using non-destructive methods. Laboratory tests were performed by Alberto Convents, Lorenzo Lazzarini and Elena Tesser in the laboratories of the University IUAV Venice, under the direct supervision of Prof. Lazzarini, director of the laboratory. The photogrammetric surveys of the krater with SFM methods were performed by the company Opera s.r.l. from Palermo with the involvement of Prof. Fabrizio Agnello and Arch. Mirco Cannella.
- [4] As regards the limits set by non-destructive analysis on the advancement of knowledge, it is not superfluous to emphasize that, with the principle of minimum invasiveness in sampling, the information that can be obtained by non-destructive investigations are, in general, strongly affected by partiality, being related only to the surfaces of materials. Surfaces often exhibit phenomena of chemical alteration (such as elemental enrichment or impoverishment) and/or physical-mechanical modifications that affect obtainable results (Matteini-Moles, 1984, 89-96).
- [5] "The recent executive order barring entry into the United States from citizens of seven nations is antithetical to the values of the Getty, and we condemn it in the strongest possible terms", asserts James Cuno in relation to the 'travel ban' of U.S. President Donald Trump (Cuno 2017) attesting to the liberal stance of the California museum on exchange between cultures.

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ABSTRACT

Focus of this paper are the complex and multifarious relationships between the Phlyax kalyx-krater with Dionysus and an Acrobat (Lipari, Museo Archeologico Eoliano "L. Bernabò Brea") and its contemporary beholders: a wide range of approaches which span from communication to fruition, from diagnostics to conservation issues, from archaeological to iconographical studies. Aim of the contribution is to provide new insights regarding seminal methods of preservation and to share the knowledge about this masterpiece within the scientific community worldwide, hopefully shedding new light for further research on the so-called "Group of Louvre K420", a workshop of painters whose production is attested by a large number of vases but still uncertain as its geographical location.



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