

## ETRUSCAN FISH-PLATES: AN UPDATE

(Con le tavv. XLVIII-L)

During a relatively recent visit to the re-installed rooms of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome, I noted for the first time a small, seemingly stemless red-figured plate (here no. 4, *tav. III a-b*) decorated with marine life, which instantly struck me as a product of a Caeretan vase-painter whose work I had recognized on three stemmed fish plates studied and published some decades ago<sup>1</sup>. My delight in having «discovered» this fish plate, which must have escaped my earlier attention due to its then poor display, was rather diminished when I realized upon consultation of I. McPhee and A.D. Trendall, *Greek Red-figured Fish-plates* 1987; henceforth *McPhee and Trendall*) that the plate had been already noted and entered – without illustration – in Appendix 4, p. 149, E4<sup>2</sup>.

Nonetheless, the presentation here of this particular fish plate in Rome, and the recent publication of another Etruscan example (also noted by Trendall, see *McPhee-Trendall*, p. 149, E5)<sup>3</sup> offers a splendid opportunity to update knowledge of such Etruscan attempts to imitate the better known fish plates by South Italian red-figured vase painters active during the second half of the 4th century B.C. For the sake of completion, I will include and illustrate all previously published Caeretan fish plates together with the hitherto unpublished specimen in Rome. When first published, plates nos. 1, 2 and 3 were recognized as the work of a single hand, but no attempt was then made to name the painter. However, with my study of plate no. 5 by an obviously different artist I called, the Hoffmann-Erbrecht Caeretan Painter, it was convenient to remove from anonymity the decorator of three – now four – Etruscan fish plates by naming him, the Caeretan Fish-plate Painter<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> M. DEL CHIARO, *Etruscan Red-Figured Vase-Painting at Caere*, 1974, hereafter, *ERVC*, p. 85f. and pl. 90; *Etruscan (Caeretan) Red-Figured Fish Plates*, in *Jahresheften des Osterreichischen archaologischen Institutes* LI 1976, pp. 11-15; and *An Etruscan (Caeretan) Fish Plate*, in *Studies in Honour of Arthur Dale Trendall*, 1979, pp. 57-60.

<sup>2</sup> Another instance of the perceptive eye of A.D. Trendall which may go to prove the truth of John Beazley's dictum, «it is not easy to glean after Trendall!»

<sup>3</sup> M. DEL CHIARO, *An Unpublished Etruscan Fish Plate*, *Archeologia Classica*, XLIII (1991), pp. 915-918.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

## THE CAERETAN FISH-PLATE PAINTER

1. CERVETERI, Museo Nazionale Cerite (*tav.* XLVIII *a-b*)

Height, 6 cm.; diameter, 18 cm.

Cuttle fish, torpedo or ray fish, and two sea perch or wrasse.

DEL CHIARO, *ERVC* p. 85 and pl. 90; *Studies in Honour of Arthur Dale Trendall*, 1979, pp. 57ff. and pl. 14; *Jahrshefte des Osterreichischen archaologischen Instituts* 51, 1976, p. 12, figs. 1-2; MCPHEE TRENDALL, *op. cit.*, p. 149, E.1; M. MARTELLI, *La ceramica degli etruschi*, 1987, fig. 154 (color).

2. VIENNA, Kunsthistorische Museum, inv. no. 4040 (*tav.* XLVIII *c-d*)

Height, 5.8 cm.; diameter, 17.5 cm.

Cuttle fish, torpedo or ray fish, and two sea perch or wrasse.

*Jahrshefte des Osterreichischen archaologischen Instituts*, 1976, p. 13, figs. 3-4; MCPHEE TRENDALL, *op. cit.*, p. 149, E2.

3. VIENNA, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. 4041 (*tav.* XLIX *a-b*).

Height, 5.6 cm.; diameter, 17.1 cm.

Cuttle fish, torpedo or ray fish, and two sea perch or wrasse.

*Jahrshefte des Osterreichischen archaologischen Instituts*, LI, 1976, p. 14, figs. 5.6; MCPHEE TRENDALL, *op. cit.*, p. 149, E3.

4. ROME, Musei Capitolini (*tav.* XLIX *c-d*)

Palazzo dei Conservatori, *ex* Castellani Collection, inv. no. 349.

Height, 3 cm.;<sup>5</sup> diameter, 16.5 cm.

Torpedo or ray fish, two sea perch or wrasse, and a horn shell.

MCPHEE TRENDALL, *op. cit.*, p. 149, E4.

## THE HOFFMANN-ERBRECHT CAERETAN PAINTER

5. LANGDEN-OBERLINDEN, Germany (*tav.* L *a-b*).

Collection of Dr. Lothar Hoffmann-Erbrecht Height, 3.5 cm.; diameter, 15.5 cm.

Cuttle fish, torpedo or ray fish, and two bream. MCPHEE TRENDALL, *op. cit.*, p. 149, E5; M. DEL CHIARO, in *Archeologia Classica*, XLIII (1991), p. 915 f.

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<sup>5</sup> The plate is presently exhibited within the *Sala* containing an assortment of vases formerly in the Castellani Collection. The vague description, «seemingly stemless», has been made because I was unable to examine the plate first-hand, but simply ordered photographs through correspondence. Hence the plate may possess a ring base, or has been broken away at the torus of the stemmed foot. Unfortunately, I have not received confirmation of my inquiries. The excellent photographs are by Barbara Malter.

All five plates show the characteristic clay of fired ceramics attributable to Caere (modern Cerveteri); i.e., buff to yellowish-grey. Equally characteristic is the use of an essentially sheenless, opaque black glaze-paint with no use of relief-line. But for minor differences in scale and decoration, the plates by the Caeretan Fish-plate Painter are very much alike and their bases (with the possible exception of no. 4; see below and note 5) possess a rather heavy torus foot. At the upper surface, or «floor» of the plate, which slopes gently towards a central depression – a usual feature, possibly to gather the fish juices or sauce – a conspicuous substitution may be noted in the chief decoration: on plate no. 4 (*tav.* 4 *a*), a horn shell (*cerithium vulgatum*) replaces the cuttlefish on plates nos. 1-3 (*tav.* 1 *a*, 2 *a*, 3 *a*). Of the four plates by his hand, nos. 1 and 2 show a narrow band with rows of alternating dots at the edge of plate; whereas plate no. 4 bears an undecorated narrow band, and no. 5 is devoid of decoration altogether. The overhanging rim is embellished with a carefully executed and evenly spaced wave pattern – pendant on nos. 1, 2 and 3, but upright on no. 4. Only a single example (no. 3) displays the wave pattern facing to the right.

The traditional Etruscan fondness for *stemmed* plates, cups, and the like is readily testified by these fish plates. When compared with their South Italian «counterparts», the Etruscan production – with its much taller and proportionately narrower profile – will contrast markedly with the South Italian plates which disclose a relatively lower profile accentuated by a deep overhanging rim<sup>6</sup>. Whether Attic, South Italian or Etruscan, and as the designation «fish plate» implies, sea life comprises the major decoration to be seen on the plates<sup>7</sup>. With but one exception mentioned earlier, it is readily apparent that the marine life represented on the first four Etruscan fish plates here listed – i.e., those by the Caeretan Fish-plate Painter – conforms in species and composition: torpedo, cuttlefish, and a pair of identical fish. In earlier studies, I simply identified the fish as «perch» because of their sleek bodies and lateral stripes. Trendall, on the other hand, has recently been more ichthyologically precise and now regards them more possibly as «wrasse».

In sharp contrast, the pair of fish on the plate by the Hoffmann-Erbrecht Caeretan Painter (no. 5, *tav.* III *a*) are not at all sleek but fat and stubby, and resemble «bream» more than any other identifiable Mediterranean fish<sup>8</sup>. On the evidence of its sharply sloping head or face and the thick body which bears a series of lateral stripes that bear a row of dots, I take this artist's bream to be a cross between a gilt head (*sparus auratus*) and a dentrix of the *sparidae* (bream) species<sup>9</sup>. The cuttlefish by this painter is spotted and, owing to the absence of

<sup>6</sup> MCPHEE-TRENDALL, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 172.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

large eyes and the possession of limp rather than squiggly tentacles, does not exhibit the perky and lively nature of the cuttlefish known to the Caeretan Fish-plate Painter. Although the shape of the torpedo's body is basically the same for both painters, the configuration of the spots over the body varies. Likewise, the mouth of the torpedo indicated by the Hoffmann-Erbrecht Caeretan Painter is more articulate and, strangely, the possessor of «lips» when compared with the torpedo's mouth rendered by the Caeretan Fish-plate Painter in two or three slightly curved and parallel lines. Furthermore, the tail of the torpedo by the latter painter is broad and straight, whereas the former artist prefers a longer, sinuous tail that suggests a swiftly swimming ray fish or torpedo.

It should be here pointed out that the Hoffmann-Erbrecht Caeretan Painter's fondness for bream, in addition to the indication of a markedly curved tail for his torpedo, strongly recall counterparts on Campanian (perhaps Paestan) red-figured fish plates produced during the second half of the 4th century B.C. by the Torpedo and Bremen Painters and their respective groups<sup>10</sup>. It is indeed difficult to say, and perhaps should not be speculated, whether or not the marine life represented on the Etruscan fish plates is actually derived directly from Campanian models or, as may be very likely, merely reflect the variety of sea life drawn from the Tyrrhenian Sea off the *Etruscan* coast which found its way to the bustling markets of Etruscan centers such as Caere or its major port, Pyrgi (Santa Severa)<sup>11</sup>.

Although the surviving Etruscan fish plates are presently few, it seems safe to assume that more examples will eventually come to light which will help to recognize a more prolific production in imitation of South Italian – Campanian in particular – models. It is already quite clear that at least one workshop responsible for *Etruscan* fish plates was located at Caere (modern Cerveteri) and employed two vase painters during the last third of the 4th century B. C.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 98-102.

<sup>11</sup> See A. PALOMBI-M. SANTARELLI, *Gli animali commestibili dei mari d'Italia*, 1969.



*a-b*) Cerveteri, Museo Nazionale Cerite. By the Caeretan Fish-Plate Painter; *c-d*) Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. 4040. By the Caeretan Fish-Plate Painter.



*a*



*b*

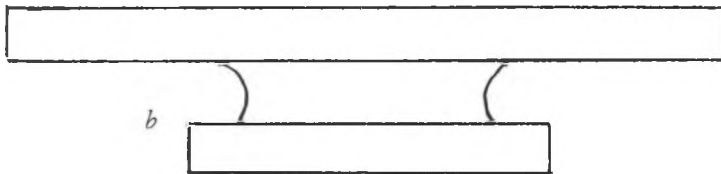


*c*



*d*

*a-b*) Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. no. 4041. By the Caeretan Fish-Plate Painter; *c-d*) Rome, Musei Capitolini. Palazzo dei Conservatori, inv. no. 349. By the Caeretan Fish-Plate Painter.



*a-b*) Dr. Lothar Hoffmann-Erbrecht Collection, Langden-Oberlinden, Germany. By the Hoffmann-Erbrecht Caeretan Painter.