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FRANCESCO MARTINETTI AND THE CISTA PASINATI:
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Richard De Puma

The art of pre-Roman Italy, especially Etruscan art, has been the target of many forgers. It is likely that the first Etruscan forgeries were made during the Roman period; the modern tradition begins with Annio da Viterbo and his fifteenth-century “Etruscan” inscriptions, and continues into the twentieth century with such notorious practitioners as the Riccardi family, who created the “Etruscan” terra-cotta warriors acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art between 1915 and 1921.¹ In recent years, thanks especially to the diligent scholarship of Marguerita Guarducci, an obscure Italian antiquities dealer by the name of Francesco Martinetti has begun to occupy a significant role in our understanding of Etruscan forgeries made during the nineteenth century.² This brief article will examine some of his output, especially his influence on our understanding and appreciation of engraved bronzes from the cemeteries at Palestrina, ancient Praeneste.

Martinetti (1833–1895) was a successful antiquities dealer in Rome. He was also a talented engraver and jeweler, an expert restorer, and a respected archaeologist. In nineteenth-century Rome, this was a potentially dangerous combination of skills. Martinetti, especially as dealer and archaeologist, was well known to the many luminaries living in Rome at the time. He was a close friend of Wolfgang Helbig (1839–1915), who was at first associated with the German Archaeological Institute in Rome

but who later became what we would call an independent scholar.³ Probably through Helbig, who as the husband of a Russian princess was very well connected to the social and intellectual elite, Martinetti made important contacts with wealthy clients in the market for antiquities. Martinetti’s archaeological work centered on Palestrina, where rich Etruscan or Italic tombs were being discovered.⁴ This put him in a unique position: he could not only excavate ancient bronzes, he could also remove them to his studios for study and restoration. It would seem that several also ended up in his private collection or were sold in his gallery.

One of the most successful and convincing archaeological and linguistic hoaxes is the product of a collaboration between Helbig and Martinetti; the amazing story of the “Fibula Praenestina” has been told authoritatively elsewhere.⁵ Here I only mention it to remind readers of the fact that this forgery was accepted as authentic for more than ninety years by almost all of the experts and was published and illustrated in numerous scholarly articles and books on ancient Italy and early Latin inscriptions. The roles of Helbig and Martinetti were never exposed or even seriously suspected until long after their deaths.

This article focuses on a specific forgery produced, it seems likely but not absolutely certain, by Martinetti. The story begins in 1864. On April 21, the traditional birthday for the founding of Rome, Heinrich von

Brunn (1822–1894), secretary of the German Archaeological Institute, delivered a major lecture.⁶ He took the opportunity to introduce to the archaeological world a newly discovered work of great importance. In his words, it seemed miraculous that this object was “almost made on purpose for the subject of a lecture on the Birthday of the City.” Indeed, it had been. The object in question was the elaborately engraved bronze lid of an ovoid cista, a type of toiletries container first recognized by the discovery of the so-called Ficoroni Cista sometime before 1738. Approximately one hundred cistae are known today. The standard type is cylindrical, although ovoid and even rectangular examples exist. Most are engraved with elaborate figural scenes, have solid-cast feet and handles, and have been found in the tombs of ancient Praeneste. Prototypes for such toiletries containers exist as early as the sixth century B.C. in

Italy, but most engraved Praenestine cistae seem to have been produced in the fourth century B.C.⁷

The object Brunn introduced in 1864 is usually called the Cista Pasinati after the name of its first known owner (Fig. 1). Later it passed into the collection of Alessandro Castellani (1823–1883) and after his death was purchased by the British Museum in 1884, twenty years after its initial publication.⁸ The lid has a solid-cast handle in the form of a female acrobat doing a back bend; this is a common type of handle for such objects.⁹ The body of the cista is ovoid and has a truncated frieze engraved with a battle scene (see detail, Fig. 4). Four solid-cast feet, in the shape of lion’s paws, support the cista. In addition, several utensils, bracelets, and balsamaria were said to have been found with the cista and are now also in the British Museum.¹⁰

The figural scene engraved on the cista



Fig. 1 The Cista Pasinati, British Museum 84.6-14.34, said to be from Palestrina. From *Monumenti dell’Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica*, VIII (1864), pl. VII (middle)



Fig. 2 Engraved lid of the Cista Pasinati. From *Monumenti dell' Instituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica*, VIII (1864), pl. VII (top)

lid (Fig. 2) is framed by an elegant border of double semicircles, each containing a palmettelike device with three fronds. These resemble the tops of small fleurs-de-lis. Between each semicircle is a similar floral ornament. There are no parallels for this border on any of the extant Praenestine cistae; most of these have more complicated vegetal borders (like the decorative frieze on the body of the Cista Pasinati, Fig. 1) or a simple wavecrest or guilloche.

The lid's figural scene may be divided into four groups of mythical characters. At the center, a bearded older man (Latinus, according to Brunn and most later scholars) stands upon a shield. Under his feet are a spear, sword, arrow and bow; flanking him on the ground is a large crested helmet at left and a cuirass at right. The man wears a laurel crown, a wreath of ivy over his shoulders, and long drapery about his waist and

over his raised left arm. His right hand clasps the left hand of a young warrior (Aeneas) to the left who wears an elaborate griffin-crested helmet. Completing this group, on the right, is a young woman (a nymph or perhaps Venus?) who advances toward the central male with her right hand pointing at him.

To the left of this central group are two armed warriors who carry the body of a dead comrade (Turnus) in their arms (Fig. 3). They look toward the center, and the warrior on the right raises his left hand, which clutches a sword and laurel wreath, as if offering it to Aeneas. Behind this raised arm we see a shield and helmet. Behind the dead Turnus is a nude, winged youth who holds a torch in his raised left hand. Another group of three figures appears on the right side of the lid. Here we see two women, apparently frightened and moving

quickly away from the center. The one on the left raises both hands while looking back to her companion, whose arms are spread wide; she clutches the drapery of the first woman with her right hand. Her own drapery billows out behind her as she rushes to the right. These women have been identified as Lavinia and Amata. A second nude, winged youth occupies the extreme right edge of the lid. This one holds his torch inverted beside his right knee while he leans on a large pile of drapery; he seems to avert his eyes, turning away from the central group. The figures in each of the flanking groups stand on rocky terrain indicated simply by irregular curving lines.

The last group shows three reclining figures spread out along the bottom of the ovoid lid. At the center is an attenuated nude male with a long beard. He holds a clump of reeds in his outstretched left hand and must represent a river god, perhaps the Tiber (or Numicus, according to Brunn). To the right is a partially draped female, another nymph, perhaps Juturna, who clutches her head with her right hand. Opposite her on the left is a nude Silenos.

From Brunn onward, these figures have been recognized as relating the story of Aeneas and the beginnings of Rome. I will not repeat the extensive interpretative discussion the engravings have elicited in the long years since their first publication. Instead, it is important to note that even as early as one year after Brunn's publication, H. Nissen was troubled by engravings that were apparently inspired by Virgil's account but executed more than three hundred years before the *Aeneid*.¹¹ R. Schöne and H. Heydemann in 1866 and 1872, respectively, were among the first to doubt, in print, the cista's authenticity.¹² In 1899, H. B. Walters

expressed doubts.¹³ In fact, Walters was absolutely correct in believing that the engravings on the lid were not ancient, but that the lid itself was. Others, too, were troubled by the engravings. In 1919, Carl Robert outlined a number of convincing reasons for doubting the authenticity of the engravings.¹⁴ But controversy continued for many years, and no less an authority than A. Alföldi offered a series of cogent arguments, many based on scientific analyses conducted at the British Museum by Reynold Higgins, to show that the cista was entirely ancient.¹⁵ Even before this, however, the cista had slowly entered the scholarly literature as a prime document of early Roman history.

On the basis of style alone, the cista lid presents several problems. For example, the left group of two warriors carrying the dead Turnus (Fig. 3) is strongly reminiscent of similar groups of solid-cast figures that form the handles of other Praenestine cistae.¹⁶ Were these handles, already well known by the mid-nineteenth century, the ultimate source for this engraved composition? It is odd, too, that the elaborate cuirass of the dead Turnus imitates so closely the cuirass worn by the dying warrior engraved on the truncated, and no doubt authentic, ovoid body of the Cista Pasinati (Fig. 4). Even the positions and depictions of the chest wounds are identical. At least two figures on the lid are more reminiscent of Antonio Canova's sculptures than figures engraved on authentic Praenestine cistae and mirrors. The winged youths with their torches are, both stylistically and iconographically, similar to ones Canova sculpted for major tombs in Rome.¹⁷ The ultimate sources for both Canova and perhaps our engraver are the friezes of Roman sarcophagi-



Fig. 3 Left side of the engraved lid of the Cista Pasinati (detail of Fig. 2)



Fig. 4 Detail of a fallen warrior engraved on the exterior of the Cista Pasinati. From *Monumenti dell' Instituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica*, VIII (1864), pl. VIII (detail)

gi, where the motif of torch-bearing erotes is common.¹⁸ But such figures do not appear in Etruscan or Praenestine art. Perhaps the most anachronistic figure of all is the elongated river god stretched out along the bottom of the composition. His bifurcated beard (Fig. 3) is unparalleled in ancient Etruscan or Praenestine art, but was fashionable in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹

If Martinetti or some other nineteenth-century engraver made this forgery, one has to ask why he did so. Profit is certainly a common motive, but in this case other factors may have played a significant role. Martinetti had access to authentic cistae. Parallels for the basic type (that is, truncated ovoid cista with *unengraved* lid) were found in the nineteenth century and are now displayed in the Villa Giulia.²⁰ It would not be difficult to imagine a forger wishing to enhance the appeal and value of such an object by adding an engraved scene. In fact, we know this was done frequently with a similar class of objects, the undecorated Praenestine bronze mirrors, many of which

passed through Martinetti's hands to find their way into private and public collections.²¹ Thus, Martinetti had a good supply of authentic but often partially unengraved bronzes, the expertise to add convincing engravings to them, plus the connections to ensure that they were seen by the most important scholars and collectors in Rome. Did he act alone? In the case of the "Fibula Praenestina," we know he did not, and here, too, it is likely that he had the advice of an expert antiquarian or scholar. At this point, who this was is impossible to say. Forgers rarely document their activities. In 1864, Helbig was twenty-five years old and had only been in Rome for about two years. He did not become assistant director of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome until 1865; it is unlikely that he was much involved with Martinetti in this early phase of his career.

I can only hypothesize that at some point before 1864, Francesco Martinetti decided to enhance with new engravings the ovoid lid of an authentic bronze cista, almost certainly discovered (probably by him) in a

Praenestine tomb. The complicated subject, surely inspired by the upcoming birthday of Rome, was perhaps created with the advice of another antiquarian scholar familiar with Virgil's story of the beginnings of Rome. Some of the compositional devices and iconography employed were derived from authentic cistae or other bronzes, but others seem closely related to contemporary works like Antonio Canova's sculptures in Rome.

As often happens with forgeries, the passage of time makes these contemporary quotations more disconcerting to us than they were to audiences in the nineteenth century. Martinetti was a skilled engraver, and no doubt many more works, some only enhanced but others totally fabricated by him, will continue to be discovered more than a century after his death.

NOTES

1. For general introductions to Etruscan forgeries, see M. Martelli, "Etruscan," sec. IX: "Forgeries," in *Dictionary of Art*, 34 vols. (New York: 1996), X, pp. 638–640; J. Szilágyi, "Fälschungen etruskischer Kunstwerke," in *Die Welt der Etrusker*, exh. cat. (Berlin: 1988), pp. 393–396; M. Pallottino, "Il problema delle falsificazioni d'arte etrusca di fronte alla critica," *Saggi di antichità*, III (Rome: 1979), 1181–1192. For the Metropolitan Museum's warriors, see D. von Bothmer and J. Noble, "An Inquiry into the Forgery of the Etruscan Terracotta Warriors," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Papers*, 11 (New York: 1961).

2. M. Guarducci, "La cosiddetta Fibula Praenestina: Antiquari, eruditi e falsari nella Roma dell'ottocento," *Memorie: Atti della Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 8th ser., vol. 24 (1980):415–545; *id.*, "La cosiddetta Fibula Praenestina: Elementi nuovi," *ibid.*, 28 (1984):127–177; *id.*, "Per la storia dell'Istituto Archeologico Germanico I, 1887: La Fibula Praenestina e Wolfgang Helbig," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 99 (1992):307–313. See also M. Perrone Mercanti, "Il Cavalier Martinetti," in M. C. Molinari *et al.*, *Il tesoro di via Alessandrina* (Milan: 1990), pp. 19–32.

3. M. Moltesen, *Wolfgang Helbig: Brygger Jacobsens Agent i Rom, 1887–1914* (Copenhagen: 1987); H. Lehman, "Wolfgang Helbig (1839–1915) an seinem 150. Geburtstag," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung* 96 (1989):7–86.

4. For a survey of this activity in the nineteenth century, see F. Zevi, "Palestrina (Praeneste)," in

Civiltà del Lazio primitivo, ed. G. Colonna, exh. cat. (Rome: 1976), pp. 213–218; G. Colonna, "Praeneste arcaica e il mondo etrusco-italico," in P. Baglione *et al.*, *La necropoli di Praeneste—Periodi orientalizzante e medio repubblicano: Atti del II Convegno di Studi Archeologici, Palestrina 21/22 aprile 1990* (Palestrina: 1992), pp. 13–51. For cistae specifically, see G. Bordenache Battaglia, *Le ciste praenestine I*, 1 (Rome: 1979), pp. xiii–xxiv; A. Emiliozzi, "Documenti per gli scavi Fiorentini del 1877–78 a Palestrina nella necropoli della Colombella," in G. Bordenache Battaglia and A. Emiliozzi, *Le ciste praenestine I*, 2 (Rome: 1990), pp. 413–418; G. Foerst, *Die Gravierungen der pränestinischen Cisten* (Rome: 1978), pp. 5–9.

5. For an excellent summary of the problems, see D. Ridgway, "Manios Faked?" *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 24 (1977):17–30, and the articles by M. Guarducci cited in n. 2, above. See also A. E. Gordon, *The Inscribed Fibula Praenestina, Problems of Authenticity*, University of California Publications: Classical Studies, 16 (Berkeley: 1975), and the review of this by G. Colonna, in *Epigraphica* 38 (1976):175–179. Colonna, "Praeneste arcaica," p. 43, n. 88, lists recent arguments expressing reservations about the total forgery of the fibula.

6. H. von Brunn, "Cista praenestina," *Annali dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 36 (1864):356–376, and *Monumenti dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica*, VIII (1864–1868), pls. VII–VIII.

7. See the introductions to both Bordenache Battaglia and Foerst, cited in n. 4, above.

8. British Museum inv. 84.6-14.34. For an authoritative account with complete bibliography to 1974,

see Bordenache Battaglia, pp. 126–130, no. *36. Recent bibliographical additions in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (henceforth *LIMC*): J.-L. Voisin, “Amata,” I, p. 585, no. 1 (gives a partial list of scholars pro and con authenticity of the lid); F. Gury, “Latinus,” VI, p. 228, no. 11; *id.*, “Latinus,” VI, p. 230, no. 6; R. Mambella, “Tiberis, Tiberinus,” VIII, p. 25, no. 3; J. Small, “Turnus,” VIII, p. 112, no. 5.

9. The handle is well illustrated in Bordenache Battaglia, pl. CLVII, fig. *36b. For closely related examples of the type, see pls. XXXIII, CLX, fig. 37c, CLXXXV, CCXVII, CCXXIII, CCXXXIV, CCXXXVIII, CCXLI; Bordenache Battaglia and Emiliozzi, pls. CCCLXI, CDIV, fig. 85a (with very similar attachments), CDXXXI, and CDXC.

10. See *Monumenti dell’Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica*, pl. VII; Bordenache Battaglia, p. 130. Note that the associated mirror is in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (inv. 54.93), not the Villa Giulia, as stated here; see R. Adam, *Recherches sur les miroirs prénestins* (Paris: 1980), no. 16. For related utensils found in cistae, see Bordenache Battaglia, pls. LXXVII, CCCXXXVIII–CCCXL, and CCCLXXXV.

11. H. Nissen, *Jahrbücher für Philologie und Paedagogik* 91 (1865):375–378. G. K. Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily and Rome*, Princeton Monographs in Art and Archaeology, 40 (Princeton: 1969), pp. 162–165, demonstrates that the scene is not precisely represented in the *Aeneid* but may be modeled on the action of XII.161 ff.

12. R. Schöne, “Le ciste prenestine,” *Annali dell’Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 38 (1866): 167 ff., no. 18; H. Heydemann, “Das Morraspiel,” *Archäologische Zeitung* 30 (1872):122.

13. H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Bronzes Greek, Roman and Etruscan in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, *British Museum* (London: 1899), no. 741, pp. 129–130.

14. C. Robert, *Archäologische Hermeneutik* (Berlin: 1919), pp. 327–332, figs. 252–254. Robert’s thoughtful analysis proposes sources for several of the figures, including the Silenos (cf. the so-called Eri-danos from the west pediment of the Parthenon) and the figure here identified as Lavinia (cf. Althaia on the Meleager Sarcophagus, fig. 255).

15. A. Alföldi, *Early Rome and the Latins* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: 1965), p. 257, pl. XII.

16. A close example: Bordenache Battaglia, pl.

XVII (Rome, Villa Giulia inv. 25210), from the Colombella necropolis at Palestrina but excavated in 1905. A related handle (pl. LXI, Berlin inv. misc. 6239) was apparently discovered in 1871 and passed through Martinetti’s hands. There are several examples of armed warriors holding a nude comrade.

17. A good example is the Cenotaph of the Last Stuarts in St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican City: C. Johns, *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe* (Berkeley: 1998), pp. 161–164, figs. 71–72. For a related figure, see the tomb of Clement XIII, also in St. Peter’s Basilica: E. Bassi, *Canova* (Bergamo: 1943), pls. 34, 37. See also I. Favaretto, “Reflections on Canova and the Art of Antiquity,” in *Canova*, exh. cat. (Venice: 1992), pp. 61–66.

18. There are numerous examples in ancient art of the funerary Eros holding a torch. For a good summary, see A. Hermary and R. Vollkommer, “Eros,” in *LIMC*, III, p. 931. Eros with a torch does not seem to be part of Etruscan iconography: I. Krauskopf, “Eros (in Etruria),” in *LIMC*, IV, pp. 1–12.

19. Galinsky, p. 164: “Of all the figures on the [Cista Pasinati] cover the Tiber, with his imposing sideburns, looks most like a fake.” Similar beards on nineteenth-century gentlemen: *Leopoldo Alinari, ca. 1860*, in W. Settimelli and F. Zevi, *Gli Alinari fotografi a Firenze, 1852–1920* (Florence: 1977), figs. 6, 8–9; George Frederick Watt’s *Portrait of Sir Edward Burne-Jones*, illustrated in F. Spalding, *Magnificent Dreams: Burne-Jones and the Late Victorians* (New York: 1978), fig. 7; Lord Leighton’s portrait of Sir Richard Burton, illustrated in J. Maas, *Victorian Painters* (New York: 1978), p. 210. Other famous Victorians who wore bifurcated beards include John Brett, Thomas Faed, Myles Foster, and Sir Joseph Paton.

20. Unengraved ovoid cistae: Rome, Museo di Villa Giulia inv. 13172, 13173, and 13174. These will be published in a later fascicle of the corpus edited by G. Bordenache Battaglia.

21. R. De Puma, “Engraved Etruscan Mirrors: Questions of Authenticity,” in *Atti del Secondo Congresso Internazionale Etrusco: Firenze 26 maggio–2 giugno 1985*, ed. G. Maetzke, 2 vols. (Rome: 1989), II, pp. 695–711, pls. I–III; *id.*, “Forgeries of Etruscan Engraved Mirrors,” in *Acts of the 13th International Bronze Congress (Journal of Roman Archaeology, suppl. series)*, ed. C. Mattusch, forthcoming.