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GENUCILIA PLATES – COMMON *AGALMATA* OR DEPICTIONS OF THE MYTH OF PERSEPHONE¹

LEENA PIETILÄ-CASTRÉN

One of the most widespread motifs of the late classical vase painting in South Italy and Sicily is the female head in profile, documented on several hundred, even thousands, of comparatively small vases as a single-figured decoration usually in a floral setting.² The practice of decorating a vase with only a profile head goes back to the first decades of sixth century B.C. in mainland Greece, where the motif appears, more or less simultaneously, in archaic Attic as well as Corinthian pottery. The female profile becomes, however, almost a standard form of decoration³ from 350 onwards in southern areas of Italy, especially in Apulia. Identification of the female figure is difficult, since most lack distinguishing attributes. Many scholars think that these ladies have lost a particular significance; other scholars interpret them as various deities,⁴ if they offer any identification at all. How

¹ I have had the pleasure of presenting my ideas in two colloquia, *The Writing Woman: Ritual and Religious Perspectives*, organized by The Finnish Institute at Athens, May 1997, and the Nordic colloquium *Keramik i kontext 2*, organized by the CVA-team in Helsinki, June 1999. I thank all my colleagues for their constructive remarks.

² A.D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania and Sicily*, Oxford 1967, 531, 561, 609, where the author calls them head vases; A.D. Trendall, *Red Figure Vases of South Italy and Sicily*, London 1989, 92, 99

³ An obsession, as it is called by A.D. Ure, *Boeotian Vases with Women's Heads*, *AJA* 57 (1953) 249.

⁴ E.g. A. Cambitoglou, *Groups of Apulian Red-Figured Vases Decorated with Heads of Women or of Nike*, *JHS* 74 (1954) 121; K. Schefold, *Die Göttersage in der klassischen und hellenistischen Kunst*, München 1981, 69–72; A.D. Trendall – A. Cambitoglou, *The Red-figured Vases of Apulia*, Oxford 1982, repr. 1998, p. lii, 447–448; E. Simon, *Hermeneutisches zur Anodos von Göttinnen*, *Ausgewählte Schriften I*, Mainz 1998, 134. P. A. Lehnert, *Female Heads on Greek, South Italian, and Sicilian Vases from the Sixth*

much "visual literacy" can one assume for the ancient viewers? Did all female heads represent the same figure, or did the viewer assign a different identification to the head depending on the vase's context of use? This paper will explore the latter possibility for one series of plates.

One of the most appealing interpretations is that the female heads represent the *anodos* or ascent of a deity from the earth or sea. Until around 500 B.C. artists frequently depicted the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus. In the early classical period the birth motif expanded and also began appearing in the form of the *anodos* of Aphrodite, Pandora, Kore-Persephone, and Gaia.⁵ The iconography of such *anodos* scenes is easily understood: a goddess is shown usually from the shoulders up to convey the action of rising up from the earth. Often other figures or a setting from the myth accompany the goddess ensuring attribution. Thus, Persephone can easily be accepted as the central figure in floral surroundings or among silens and satyrs, conspicuous figures of a rural setting, both alluding to Persephone's return from the underworld in the beginning of the early spring and the blooming of nature.

More difficult to interpret are the very plain and simplified representations of female heads on vases of the late classical and early hellenistic period. The pictorial decoration becomes modest and simplified, either owing to the Platonic ideas of the fourth century, the vases' connections to the mystery cults,⁶ or the change of working methods in the workshops. The studies of these types of vases have generally concentrated on the chronology, workshops, individual painters and their distribution through trade, and only rarely on the identification of the heads. It is, of course, a possibility that in different geographical areas the vessels with the

to the Third Century B.C. as Representations of Persephone/Kore, an unpublished Master thesis from Michigan State University, 1978. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Kathleen M. Lynch, University of Virginia/Excavations of the Athenian Agora, for obtaining a copy of the thesis for me, and for her many useful remarks in various phases of my writing this article.

⁵ H. Metzger, *Recherches sur l'imagerie athénienne*, Paris 1965, 11–14; C. Bérard, *Anodoi. Essai sur l'imagerie des passages chthonies*, Neuchâtel 1974, 43–45, 55–60; E.H. Loeb, *Die Geburt der Götter in der griechischen Kunst der klassischen Zeit*, Jerusalem 1979, 12–13, 140–141; Trendall 1989, 93.

⁶ Loeb, 13; Ch. Zindel, *Meeresleben und Jenseitsfahrt. Die Fischteller der Sammlung Florence Gottet*, Zürich 1998, 186.

female heads were connected with different deities. Was the striking preference for female heads more than just a casual motif for the workshops, as well as for the consumers, and could these vases correlate with the popularity of chthonic religions in which women play an important role, especially with the widespread cult of Persephone and Demeter in South Italy?⁷

Chronology, iconography and shape

How much visual literacy can we assume for ancient viewers, and how can we possibly reconstruct the identity of a generic-looking female profile in modern times? Should we just accept it as a mere decoration without any ritual, religious or other internal significance? These questions apply to a series of vases called Genucilia plates apparently produced in Falerii, Caere and Rome during the latter half of the fourth century and the two first decades of the third century B.C.⁸ It is the purpose of this article to test the possibility that the Genucilia plates – the last and northernmost production of female profile vases – are connected with Persephone by tracing the range of the cult, the popularity and modes of her iconography in the fourth century B.C., as well as considering some of the known find contexts of the plates. Even if the Genucilia plates were a manifestation of the cultural and artistic common language around Rome and the southern Etruscan centres, there must be, to my mind, a reason for such a persistent production with only two variations in the pictorial design: the profile head and the star.⁹ Both designs were produced in a relatively restricted area for a

⁷ Lehnert 47, 108, 156–158.

⁸ For the chronology see M. Del Chiaro, *The Genucilia Group: A Class of Etruscan Red-figured Plates*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1957, 306–313, 328, whose dates are corrected by G. Colonna, *ArchClass* 11 (1959) 134–136; C.C. van Essen, *Review of Del Chiaro's Genucilia Group*, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 17 (1960) 97–99. The lower chronology is nowadays generally accepted, L. Bacchielli, *I piattelli Genucilia*, in *Italian Iron Age Artefacts in the British Museum* (ed. by J. Swaddling), London 1986, 375–376.

⁹ The departures from the two main motifs in the pictorial design, such as the prow of a ship and a satyr like male profile, are isolated cases. Some of the alternative motifs may have had political undercurrents, see G. Pianu, *La diffusione della tarda ceramica a figure rosse: un problema storico-commerciale*, *QAEI* 10 (1985) 81.

relatively long period, some three generations, with no variation at all in the shape of the plate. The style was a relic from the long red-figure tradition, and is sometimes called the pseudo- or degenerate red-figure technique as the figures were executed by actual painting, not by reserving space.

The most common decoration in the inner depression of the Genucilia plates was the female profile, most often turned to the left. Over the decades it lost its aesthetic appeal completely, and the later plates tend to show real monsters.¹⁰ The other, somewhat later variation of the main decoration, is a star with different kinds of rosettes or other small decorations in between the rays (see p. 103, 105–106). Both medallion decorations are encircled by a wave pattern on the rim, running mostly towards the left. In the early plates, the waves were framed with two incised grooves, and the lip, part of the exterior of the bowl and the base were all painted with a diluted glaze.

The shape of the plates, regardless of decoration, remained consistent with only small variations throughout the whole production: a clearly distinguished foot with a base, a broad flat bowl and a wide overhanging lip. The diameter of the plate is c. 14 cm and the height c. 5 cm. A totally black-glazed version of the shape was also popular in Rome and Southern Etruria around 300 B.C.¹¹ The characteristics of the shape itself, especially with a painted decoration, justifies its use as a religious object, an *agalma*, in which a deity of a sanctuary or a person, alive and dedicated to a cult, or dead in the grave, was meant to delight.¹² During the fourth century B.C. the symposium lost its significance along with the necessary vast set of dishes. The table utensils were diminished in number and shapes, most of the remaining shapes being better adapted for food than for liquids.¹³ A small Genucilia vessel with its complicated lip would have been an uncomfortable dish, indeed, for ordinary drinking or eating.¹⁴ The shape was better suited for a votive offering.

¹⁰ See, for instance, the plates 22–24 in Del Chiaro, 351–355.

¹¹ J.-P. Morel, *Céramique campanienne: les formes*, Rome 1981, 80–81, planche 1, formes 1111–1112.

¹² For the term *agalma*, G. Zuntz, *Persephone. Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia*, London 1971, 106.

¹³ M. Torelli, *L'arte degli etruschi*, Roma–Bari 1985, 163, 188.

¹⁴ For comparison see the discussion of the use of the fish plates by Zindel, 172–176; he does not accept the everyday use of the fish plates as a realistic possibility.

The extent of the cult of Persephone in the Genucilia group's production area

How prevalent was the cult of Persephone alone or with her mother Demeter/Ceres¹⁵ in and around the area which produced Genucilia plates? On an impasto urn dated to the early 6th century B.C. and discovered in a tomb in the necropolis of Colonneta in Falerii Veteres there is a Faliscan inscription with the names of Ceres and Liber.¹⁶ Even though of a private nature, the find shows that the goddess was known and worshipped with one of her triadic companions at this early stage. This is a very early proof of Demeter-Ceres' connection to Bacchus-Liber, who as a god of the dead, was almost equivalent to the underworld god Hades, and in this way connected also to Persephone.

In Rome itself, a temple to Ceres, Liber and Libera, corresponding to the Eleusinian triad, was consecrated in 493 B.C. on the eastern slope of the Aventine hill as a public dedication after a vow by the dictator A. Postumius.¹⁷ According to the literary sources, the temple itself was constructed in the traditional Etrusco-italic style, but the sculptural decoration and paintings were executed by Greek artists, Damophilos and Gorgasos.¹⁸ It is probably during this century that the first hellenization of the cult took place in Rome. The cult in Rome is likely to have had an intimate relationship to the cults in Cumae, Tarentum and Sicily, as the priestesses of Ceres in Rome were always of South Italian origin. The anniversary of this triad was celebrated on the 19th of April in the form of a festival called

¹⁵ Since Homer, Demeter and Persephone were always associated. For the intimate connection between the deities, see H. Le Bonniec, *Le culte de Cérés a Rome. Des origines à la fin de la République*, Paris 1958, 292–294; A. Peschlow-Bindokat, *Demeter und Persephone in der attischen Kunst des 6. bis 4. Jahrhunderts v.Chr.*, *JDAI* 87 (1972) 60.

¹⁶ E. Vetter, *Handbuch der italischen Dialekte*, Heidelberg 1953, 279–283, n. 241; Le Bonniec 303–304; G. Giacomelli, *Il falisco*, in *Popoli e civiltà dell'Italia antica* 6:1, *Lingue e dialetti*, Roma 1978, 509, 525–526. I thank my colleague Timo Sironen, *phil.lic.*, from the University of Oulu, for his remarks on the dating and text of this inscription.

¹⁷ *Dion. Hal.* 6, 17, 2–4; 6, 94, 3.

¹⁸ *Plin. nat.* 35,154.

Cerialia.¹⁹ At least in the latter half of the third century, there seems to have been another festival in August of more private nature, in which men were not allowed to participate. It was conducted by Roman *matronae* and included a nocturnal initiation.²⁰ This feast seems to have concentrated on two remarkable events in the myth of Persephone and Ceres: the abduction of Persephone by Hades and her return from the underworld. Thus, it borrowed features from the Greek Thesmophoria rather than from the Eleusinian mysteries and was interpreted as a metaphor for a young woman's life, in which the abduction symbolized her marriage.²¹ Throughout its area of influence in the fourth century B.C., the cult of Persephone seems to have displayed more private features, one of which was a common sacrificial meal.²²

The iconography of Persephone in the fourth century B.C.

The underworld god Hades carrying off Persephone as his bride appears as a motif on Apulian vase painting around 370 and was very popular during the second half of the century. This motif appears almost without exception in sepulchral contexts in Southern Italy.²³ It is also attested in the Macedonian painting in the middle of the fourth century, on the north wall of the well-known tomb of Persephone in Vergina.²⁴ The general interest in the Persephone cycle was based on her connections to Orphism

¹⁹ For the beginnings of the cult see Le Bonniec, 297–302; G. Pugliese Carratelli, Lazio, Roma e Magna Graecia, *ParPas* 23 (1968) 341–342; E. Simon, *Die Götter der Römer*, München 1990, 266 n. 25. For the chronology and development of the cult of Ceres, see also F. Bernstein, *Ludi publici. Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Entwicklung der öffentlichen Spiele im republikanischen Rom*, Stuttgart 1998, 81–82, 165–166.

²⁰ Cic. *leg.* 2,9,22; Liv. 22, 56, 4: for the year 216; Val.Max. 1,1,15; M. Beard – J. North – S. Price, *Religions of Rome*, Cambridge 1998, I: 70–71, II: 179–181.

²¹ Lehnert, 103–4, 107; R. Lindner, *Der Raub der Persephone in der antiken Kunst*, Würzburg 1984, 24–25; V. Hinz, *Der Kult von Demeter und Kore auf Sizilien und in der Magna Graecia*, Wiesbaden 1998, 230.

²² Hinz, 229.

²³ Lindner, 45.

²⁴ LIMC VIII, s.v. Persephone, 969, nr 213 (G. Güntner).

and mystery religions, and the hope for an afterlife her myth suggested. Nearer to our area of interest, Persephone and Hades were depicted in Southern Etruria, in the Tomba Golini I in Orvieto at an infernal banquet, another popular theme, and dated to c. 350, and in Tarquinia in the contemporary Tomba dell'Orco II.²⁵ Even later, the subject of Persephone's abduction was very popular on Roman sarcophagi.

I have listed only a few examples of the moving of the pictorial motifs, which originally happened through the mediation of Greek artists coming from Magna Graecia and Campania. The prototypes of the Genucilia plates, made by the Berkeley Genucilia painter active in Falerii before 350, also have a strong Greek flavour and Attic character in their use of a relief line, which was abandoned in all subsequent production.²⁶ In the plates of this first Genucilia painter, the shoulders of the lady in profile are still quite visible, a feature which becomes less defined in his later products and disappears totally in the succeeding artists' plates. The head itself fills most of the medallion. The original concept of showing the woman from the shoulders upwards is an important criterion, however, for identifying the profile vases as depicting an *anodos*, the symbolic ascent of Persephone. Comparanda for the *anodos* of Persephone unaccompanied by clarifying attributes can be found on two red-figure lekythoi decorated only with a woman depicted from the waist or pelvis upwards, in both cases identified as Persephone by scholars.²⁷ Furthermore, on a red-figure krater from Dresden the intent gaze between Hermes and the resurrecting Persephone is emphasized by the inclined head.²⁸

Another characteristic feature of the *anodos* of Persephone is a floral setting, which is also present in the Genucilia vessels. In the earliest plates a laurel wreath surrounds the medallion instead of the wave pattern, and often a solitary leaf appears at the nape of the woman's neck. It is not easy to explain the leaf detail if it is not understood as a survival from an ampler

²⁵ Pittura etrusca al museo di Villa Giulia, *Studi di archeologia* 6 (1989), 155–159. See also Hinz, 229.

²⁶ Del Chiaro, 251–253.

²⁷ Bérard, 134–136, pl. 16, fig. 56–57.

²⁸ Dresden 350; Bérard, pl. 16, fig. 53. See also Peschlow-Bindokat, 95–96.

floral ornament.²⁹ In more complicated depictions, the flowering plants can perhaps be understood as transmitting the idea of the triumph of life over death.³⁰ The wave pattern around the inner depression of a plate is common enough in South Italian vasepainting and can be without any specific meaning. In the Apulian fishplates it is considered, however, to be an essential part of their use as grave goods, in the same manner as funerary wreaths made of evergreen leaves.³¹

The distinguishing mark of all the Genucilia ladies is their jewellery, a beaded necklace and a pendant type of earring. The curly hair is dressed with a decorative diadem, originally with three spikes³² and a net like *sakkos*. The diadem resembles Persephone's bridal crown, which was a characteristic feature in Apulian vase painting.³³ The eyes are also worth noting, especially on the earliest and most carefully executed examples. Under the clearly marked eyebrow there are usually three lines which form the eyeball. The pupil itself is drawn on the upper half of the eye,³⁴ creating thus the impression of her looking upwards at the person assisting at the *anodos*.

Examples of female profiles

I have used seven fragments from the excavations of Ficana, a Latin site near Ostia on the southern shore of the Tiber, to illustrate the female profile motif. The first is a rim fragment with two densely set waves and part of the medallion. The profile from the eyes down to the throat and shoulder is preserved, and the first bead of the necklace is visible. The

²⁹ Id. 315.

³⁰ Trendall 1989, 267.

³¹ Zindel, *passim*, 195.

³² In some plates the spikes are very similar to leaves. Cf. L. Bacchielli, *Un piattello "di Genucilia"*. I rapporti di Cirene con l'Italia nella seconda metà del IV sec. a.C., *Quaderni di archeologia della Libia* 8 (1976) 99.

³³ Lindner 51.

³⁴ This feature can sometimes be observed on the female profile plates from other production areas, too. Cf. Cambitoglou, 121.

slightly open mouth is turned down sharply at the corner. The eye is indicated by the eyebrow and two lines for the upper lid (Fig. 1).³⁵ The two grooves framing the waves as well as the careful painting dates this fragment to the early phase of the production, soon after 350 B.C.

The second fragment preserves part of the rim and bowl and shows five beads of the necklace, the jaw and the lower lip of the left-facing profile (Fig. 2).³⁶ It can be ascribed to a somewhat later production, to the latter half of the fourth century. The waves are within two incised lines. The nearest parallels for this kind of a profile head come from the production of the Group of the Florence Genucilia painter, which covers at least three separate artists, the painters of Ostia, Tarquinia and Florence, according to Del Chiaro's classification.³⁷

The third fragment preserves part of the rim and bowl. One can discern with difficulty the upper part of the head with the diadem and three framing waves (Fig. 3).³⁸ Of the eye, only a dot remains, unless it is a dot in front of it, as the eye was accentuated by some of the painters. The diadem with a dot pattern has spikes, the foremost of which reaches over the inner groove of the wave pattern. The hair under the diadem is also visible. The dating is to the latter half of the fourth century.

The fourth small fragment preserves part of a diadem with two spikes

³⁵ I am grateful to the Soprintendenza archeologica di Ostia for letting me publish these fragments before the final publication of excavation zone 6b. Instead of a chronological order, I have organized the fragments so that they form a whole profile. Ficana nr. 43900; diam. 16,0 cm; the waves are painted with dark brown slip, the linear painting of the band on the exterior of the bowl and the overhanging lip changes from orange to black. The clay according to Munsell, 5 YR 7/6, reddish yellow. In this fragment the edge is turned slightly upwards. A near parallel to this fragment comes from Ostia, M.G. Lauro, Una classe di ceramiche ad Ostia: il gruppo Genucilia, *Rivista di studi Liguri* 45 (1979) 58–59, inv.n. 16542, fig. 7a.

³⁶ Ficana nr. 43868; diam. 14,0 cm; the slip, also on the overhanging lip, is of dark brown colour. The clay, 5 YR 7/6, reddish yellow. Cf. the chin-throat-line in Lauro 54–55, inv.n. 5207, figs 2 & 3c.

³⁷ Del Chiaro, 258–261.

³⁸ Ficana nr. 43920. The slip is orange brown, also on the lip and the exterior of the bowl. The clay, 5 YR 7/4, pink.

and parts of two waves inside the framing grooves (Fig. 4).³⁹ The marking of the foremost spike with a dot, as well as the painting of the waves, brings this fragment very near to the Florence Genucilia painter and the latter half of the fourth century.⁴⁰

The fifth fragment is part of the medallion. The dotted diadem with at least one spike, the net like *sakkos*, part of the ear and the earring with pendants, as well as the wavy tress of hair, can still be seen (Fig. 5).⁴¹ The quality of the painting dates this fragment to the decades after 350.

The sixth fragment, part of the rim, shows the net *sakkos* and a little of the diadem with vertical strokes. The spare space at the nape of the neck seems to have developed into a curving leaf like element, imitating the adjoining wave pattern between the grooves (Fig. 6).⁴²

The seventh fragment is one of the earliest of this small collection (Fig. 7).⁴³ Only part of the beaded necklace and two pendants of the earring are visible. The two densely set waves are framed with grooves, and the rim, which is turned slightly up, as in the first example (Fig. 1), is emphasized with orange slip. The skill of the potter and/or the painter can easily be discerned even in this small fragment. Accordingly, the date is closer to 350 B.C.

The Genucilia fragments from Ficana, depicting the female profile, are from the latter half of the fourth century, except two (Figs. 1, 7), which belong to the very early production, c. 350. They all represent plates of good quality and seem to have parallels, naturally enough, with Ostia and belong, in the old classification of Del Chiaro, to the group of the Florence Genucilia Painter.

³⁹ Ficana nr. 38366. The slip, also on the overhanging lip, is dark brownish. The clay, 5 YR 6/6, reddish yellow.

⁴⁰ Del Chiaro, 258, 344–345, pl. 19d.

⁴¹ Ficana nr. 43912, 12,0 x 8,5 cm. The slip is blackish brown. The clay, 5 YR 7/6, reddish yellow. A somewhat similar earring with three pendants, tress, diadem and *sakkos* come from Ostia, in Lauro 56, inv.n. 5208, fig. 4b.

⁴² Ficana nr. 38367. Dark brown slip, which also covers the overhanging lip. The clay, 5 YR 6/6, reddish yellow.

⁴³ Ficana nr. 38368; the slip is brown orange. The clay, 5 YR 6/6, reddish yellow.

Star pattern

The star or cross pattern is a slightly later iconographic variation, though equally consistent as the female profile. The star consists of four or more leaf-shaped rays grouped around a central dot. The filling motifs in-between the rays vary from dot rosettes to striped chevrons. Is it possible that the star motif is also connected with the cult of Persephone?⁴⁴ The problem is determining whether the star is merely an abstract design or whether it possesses some hidden significance. Both the iconography of the female profile and the myth of Persephone may offer clues to an interpretation of the star motif.

The *sakkos* of the Genucilia heads was sometimes decorated with one or several stars of different quality.⁴⁵ For some reason the painters elevated this simple detail to the main motif of the medallion.⁴⁶ In order to clarify the importance of the star in Persephone's iconography, we must return to accounts of the myth. Persephone's abduction is briefly mentioned in Hesiod's *Theogony* without any details,⁴⁷ and again in the Homeric hymn to Demeter, created at the latest in the sixth century. The author of the hymn includes a description of the starry sky, οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα, as important to the scene before Persephone's appearance in the underworld.⁴⁸ A very late source, the epic poet Claudian of the fourth century A.D., in his poem, *de raptu Proserpinae*, describes in more detail the stars deserting their

⁴⁴ A few plates with the star and the Greek letters EPA painted on the rim before firing have been interpreted by M. Cristofani as signifying Heracles, *Altre novità sui Genucilia*, *QAEI* 10 (1985) 21–23. The prominent inscription on these plates set them apart as exceptions. As dedications, it seems more likely that the deity of the inscription is Hera not Herakles. Furthermore, the plates on p. 23, fig. 3 seem to belong to a relatively late phase of the production.

⁴⁵ One of the most obvious cases is the production of the Copenhagen Genucilia Painter, see Del Chiaro, 261–262, 345, pl. 19f.

⁴⁶ It is especially in the Apulian vase painting that the star often served as an ornament, not always, however, K. Schauenburg, *Gestirnbilder in Athen und Unteritalien*, *Antike Kunst* 5 (1962) 61.

⁴⁷ Hes. *Theog.* 912–914.

⁴⁸ h.Hom. Cer. 33. For the dating of the hymn, F. Cassola, *Inni omerici*, 1975, Milano 1991 (5), p. LVIII–LXII.

accustomed courses and the disturbed movement of other celestial bodies as Hades emerged from the depths of the earth to claim his bride.⁴⁹ The contrast between light and darkness as well as the stars in the sky, are conceits in both narratives.

In depictions of the rape of Persephone on South Italian vases, torches are not only placed in Demeter's and Hecate's hands, but Persephone is also depicted holding them; torches are, in fact, specifically her attributes.⁵⁰ Most often the torches are depicted as cross headed. Examples of stars in the sky as well as torches, carried by the assisting female goddesses, can be seen on an Apulian volute krater by the Iliupersis-painter from 360,⁵¹ and on an Apulian loutrophoros by the Dareios-painter from c. 340.⁵² Stars and torches also appear on an Apulian volute krater by a follower of the Baltimore-painter from 320.⁵³ In this vase, the events are presented in three registers set one above the other: Persephone's companions playing ball in the lowest register, the abduction in the middle, and Olympian goddesses and gods uppermost. The stars, along with the torches, should be seen as part of the nighttime atmosphere of the middle scene, not just elements used to separate the scene from the celestial sphere of the gods above.⁵⁴

There is also an Apulian bowl from ca. 330 B.C. which depicts two crucial moments of Persephone's myth: the abduction and the *anodos*.⁵⁵ Only the main protagonists, Hades and Persephone, are depicted, perhaps due to the limited space available in the tondo. There is a solitary star and then, interesting enough, in the segment below the main depiction, a female head in three quarter profile emerging from among the flora. It cannot be any one other than Persephone in her resurrection.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Claud. rapt. Pros. 2,186–194.

⁵⁰ Peschlow-Bindokat, 92, 96, 102; Hinz, 41, 118–119, 197. RE (1909) Mau, s.v. Fackeln, 1946.

⁵¹ London BM F 277; LIMC IV s.v. Hades 381 nr 84 (R. Lindner).

⁵² LIMC IV s.v. Hades 382, nr 86.

⁵³ KH Basel; LIMC IV s.v. Hades 382, nr 88.

⁵⁴ For the division of the three fields, see Lindner, 26.

⁵⁵ In private ownership in Vienna; Lindner, Tafel 6; LIMC VIII s.v. Persephone, 968, nr 197.

⁵⁶ In this case, it is a little farfetched to name this head as Demeter, as is done by

The possibility that the star is an alternative and complement to the profile decoration of the Genucilia plates relies first, on a concrete level, to the importance of the star and perhaps also of the cross-headed torch as means of lighting and temporal setting in depictions of the abduction of Persephone.⁵⁷ Secondly, the star could symbolize the darkness during Persephone's absence from the earth and her subsequent rebirth after darkness, a most important aspect in the definition of Persephone as the mistress of the underworld and queen of the dead. Furthermore, if we wish to connect the plates to female devotées and especially to brides, very much of the same symbolism is still valid. Death and marriage, closely associated, were followed by a new life and fertility. Consequently, the female profile is equivalent to the *anodos*, while the star would symbolize the abduction, hope and expectation of the future rebirth, the light after darkness. A similar symbolic quality can be ascribed to the iconography of a nimbus. When painted round the heads of the underworld gods, it may refer to a person's hope in a life beyond death.⁵⁸

Since we do not have enough information about the rituals of the cult of Persephone and Ceres for the fourth century B.C., we cannot ascertain the extent of dualism, if any, in the cult at this time. The feast mentioned by Livy for the year 216 B.C. (see p. 98), must have been observed earlier as nothing in the narrative gives the impression of its being celebrated for the first time that year. Furthermore, the Persephone cycle is so evident in fourth century B.C. Apulian vase-painting that it is difficult to accept a late, third century awakening to this crucial aspect of the cult in Rome and its surroundings.

Examples of the star pattern

The first example of the star motif here is another fragment from Ficana. It has a dotted chevron placed relatively centrally in each quadrant (Fig. 8).⁵⁹ It has parallels from Caere, and is datable to c. 300.⁶⁰ The other

Lindner, 28.

⁵⁷ The torches are discussed by Lindner, 45–46.

⁵⁸ Schauenburg, 62–63. This idea is followed also by Lindner, 28.

⁵⁹ Ficana nr. 43863. The diam. c. 15 cm; the brown slip covers also the hanging lip, the

item is from a private Finnish collection. It has W-shaped motifs in each quadrant as a filler (Fig. 9).⁶¹ It also has parallels from Caere,⁶² and is datable to 300. Both of these examples of the star motif belong to the early phases of the production, distinguished by relatively good quality.

Some find contexts

Genucilia plates have been discovered in domestic sites as well as in sepulchral contexts.⁶³ If my idea of their connection to Persephone is right, they were, in the end, destined for tombs, where they actually occur sometimes in large quantities, a dozen or more is by no means a rarity.⁶⁴ The great number can partly be due to the serial production and, accordingly, the reasonable price of these vases. Furthermore, it seems to have been a distinctive feature, at least in sanctuaries of Persephone, that pottery offerings were of modest quality, numerous and adaptable for both food and drink, and probably used in the rituals.⁶⁵ The Genucilia plates could well have fulfilled all these requirements. A predilection for the star motif seems to be prominent at least in some tombs of the necropolis of Caere.⁶⁶

wave pattern is framed by two incised grooves. The clay, 5 YR 6/6, reddish yellow.

⁶⁰ Del Chiaro, 284, pl. 25c; *Gli Etruschi e Cerveteri. Nuove acquisizioni delle Civiche Raccolte Archeologiche*, catalogo della mostra a Palazzo Reale, Milano, 1980, 171, the tomb 200, at the Laghetto necropolis.

⁶¹ Helen and Veikko Väänänen collection, at the Classical Department of the University of Helsinki; diam. mouth 13,7 cm, diam. foot 7,5 cm, height 5,4 cm; the clay, 7.5 YR 8/3, pink. The slip varies from orange to dark brown; the five waves are not framed with incisions, the overhanging lip and the base of the foot are covered with opaque slip, on the exterior of the bowl there is a painted band.

⁶² Del Chiaro, 287.

⁶³ For the diffusion of the Genucilia plates in the Mediterranean, Pianu, 75, 79.

⁶⁴ I. Scott Ryberg, *An Archaeological Record of Rome from the Seventh to the Second Century B.C.*, London 1940, 101; *Gli etruschi e Cerveteri*, 251–253. The tomb 69 from the necropolis Laghetto I contained 21 Genucilia plates, all of which were decorated with star patterns, nos. 5–25.

⁶⁵ Hinz 48–49.

⁶⁶ *Gli etruschi e Cerveteri*, 97, 98, n. 23.

Unfortunately, there is no indication of the sex of the deceased. We know, however, that at least one owner of a Genucilia plate was a lady, *P(o)plia Cenucilia*, the eponym of the whole group. Her name was painted before firing in Latin characters under the foot of a profile motif plate of Caeretan origin.⁶⁷ One plate can be directly associated with cult of Persephone. A profile motif plate of somewhat later production originates from the Fosse di Persephone at Locri,⁶⁸ This votive deposit at the extramural cult area of Mannella was dedicated to Persephone, the tutelary goddess of Locri.

This paper has presented evidence which may identify the Genucilia plates as implements of the cult of Persephone in the area around Rome during the fourth century B.C. They appear in two varieties, with a female profile and a star, which can both be interpreted as allegoric symbols of the most important phases of the goddess' cult. The star may symbolize her abduction by Hades, and the female profile the resurrection of the goddess with the coming of spring. The simple iconography would be in harmony with the generalizing iconographic tendencies of the fourth century B.C. to no longer depict narrative mythological scenes, nor to depict aspects of the mystery religions other than by indicating the rituals indirectly as here. The small plate, or several of them, could be kept at home as a memento of participating in the rituals, possibly of secret nature, and then put into the grave to accompany the deceased on the journey to the life beyond. These seemingly generic images take on specific meaning when their context of use is re-established. The ancient viewer associated the image and the vase form with specific activities, in this case probably a ritual, which allow one to mentally identify the figure or symbol with the myth of Persephone.

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⁶⁷ CVA, USA 2, Providence 1, pl. 29a–c; CIL I² 2891. Del Chiaro, 293; For the Roman, Phaliscan and Etruscan contacts of the lady and her family, see M. Cristofani – G. Proietti, *Novità sui Genucilia*, *Prospettiva* 31 (1982) 71; V. Jolivet, *La ceramique etrusque des IV–III s. a Rome*, *QAEI* 10 (1985) 65–66.

⁶⁸ Reggio Calabria, Museo Civico, no. 772; Del Chiaro, 270.

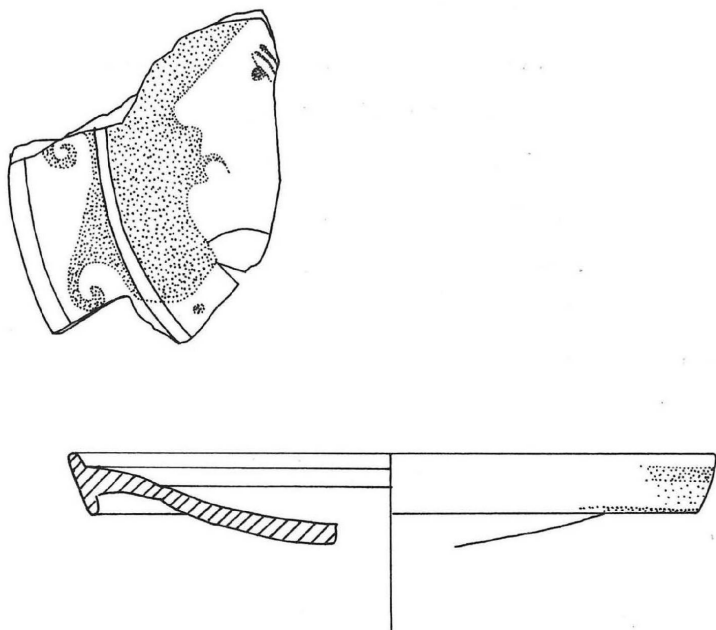


Fig. 1 (scale 1:2)

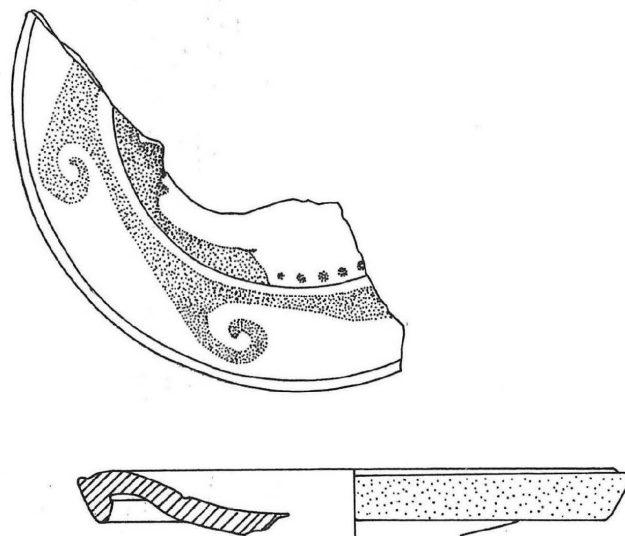


Fig. 2 (scale 1:2)

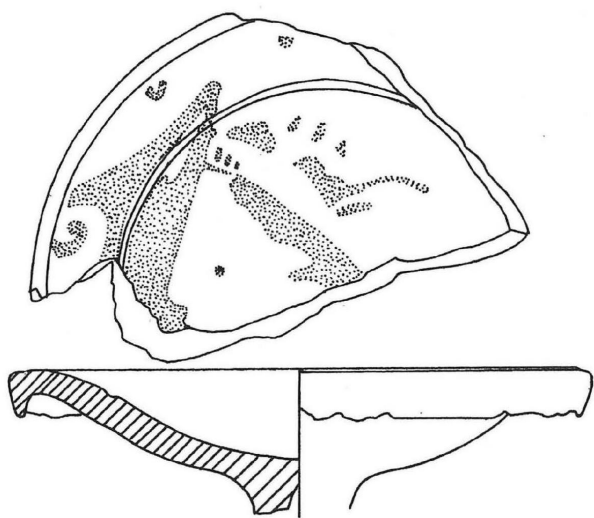


Fig. 3 (scale 1:2)

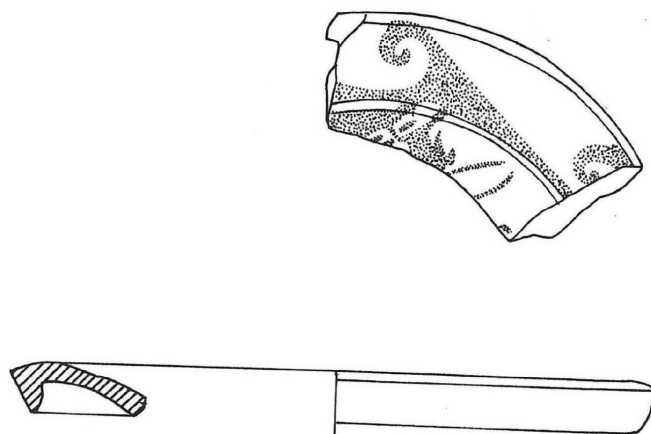


Fig. 4 (scale 1:2)

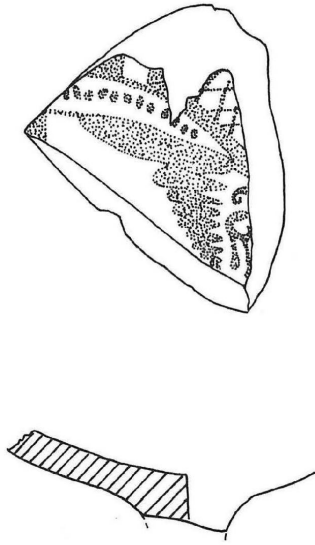


Fig. 5 (scale 1:2)

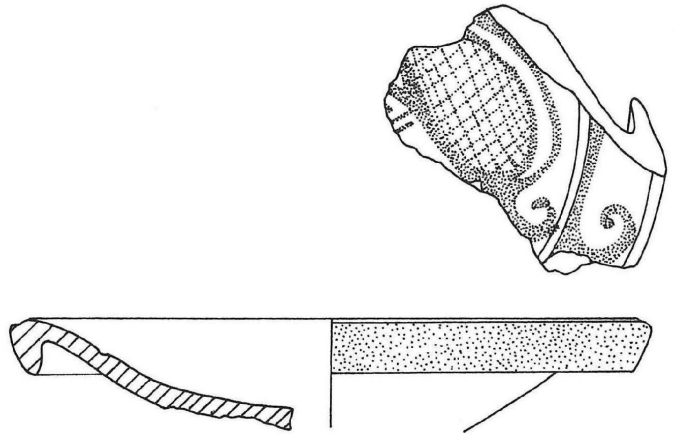


Fig. 6 (scale 1:2)

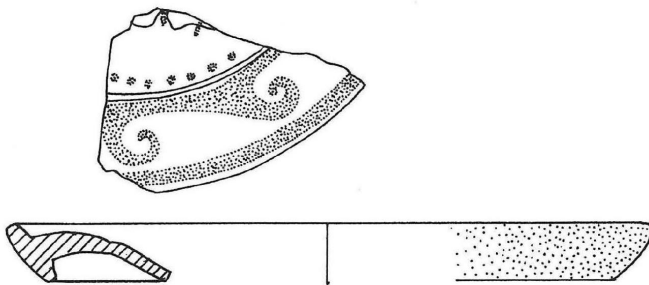


Fig. 7 (scale 1:2)

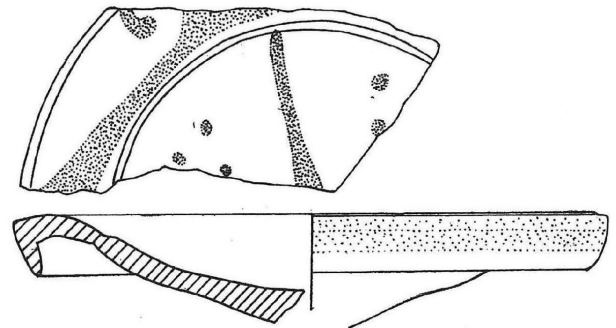


Fig. 8 (scale 1:2)

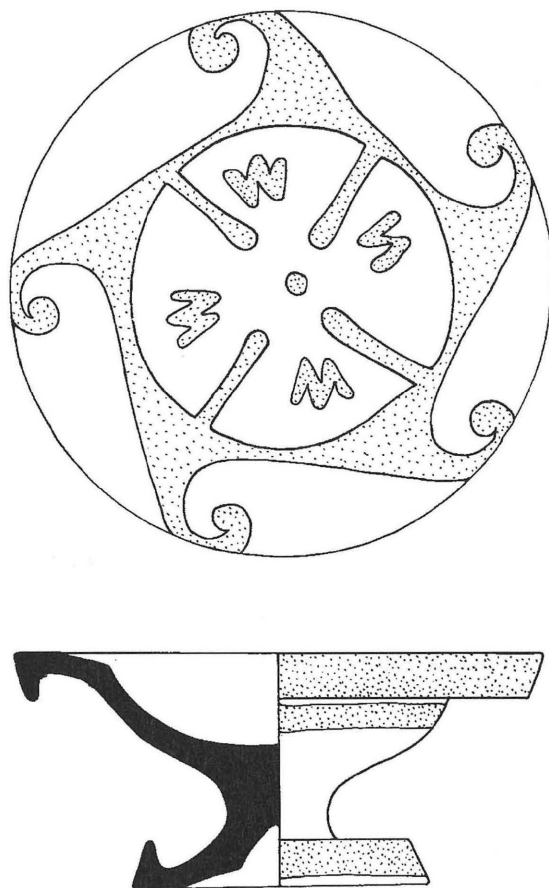


Fig. 9 (scale 1:2)