

## Book Review

# Materiali etrusco-italici e greci da Vulci (scavi Gsell) e di provenienza varia

By **Ferdinando Sciacca**, with contributions by Lucina Vattuone and drawings by Elisa Cella (La Collezione del Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1). Pp. 447, numerous color and b&w figs. Vatican City, Edizioni Musei Vaticani 2017. €90.00. ISBN 978-88-8271-388-1.

Reviewed by **Richard Daniel De Puma**: F. Wendell Miller Distinguished Professor Emeritus, School of Art and Art History, The University of Iowa, 141 Riverside Dr., Iowa City, IA 52242, E-Mail: richard-depuma@uiowa.edu

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This title is the first in a new series that will publish the antiquities collection of the Pontificio Istituto Biblico in Rome. The Institute was founded by Pope Pius X in 1909 and is administered by the Jesuits. Although technically considered a part of the Vatican, it occupies Palazzo Muti Papazzurri on the Piazza della Pilotta (near Palazzo Colonna) in central Rome. Lucina Vattuone provides a useful history of the collection and its contents in a preamble (15–28). Archival photographs show typical early display cases crowded with everything from stuffed crocodiles to bronze menorahs. In April 1982 the antiquities portion of the collection formally became part of the Vatican Museums, with the proviso that it would still be available for study by the Institute's students and faculty. The Vatican would ensure the collection's conservation and would incorporate the antiquities into the relevant sections of the Museum's many areas. To facilitate this process Pierre Proulx prepared a general summary of the Institute's collection. His inventory divides objects into 15 basic groups (e.g., flora, fauna, birds, antiquities, numismatics, utensils, minerals, etc.), then gives totals for each group, as well as provenience (if known; many are not) and sometimes materials (e.g., terracotta, bronze, wood, parchment, etc.). It is a highly varied list of about 7,500 objects and not unlike the inventory for a small 19<sup>th</sup> century natural history museum.

Ferdinando Sciacca's fine introduction (29–36) precedes his extensive catalogue of Etruscan and Greek materials selected for this first definitive publication. Although some portions of the Near Eastern and Egyptian collections have been published (29, n. 3), this book is the first authoritative study of a significant por-

tion of the antiquities collection. It is all the more valuable because, unlike most of the antiquities in the Institute's collection, a good portion of the material has a valid provenience: Vulci. Explorations at this major Etruscan site began in 1828 with the fortuitous discovery of a tomb on property belonging to Napoleon's brother Lucien Bonaparte, the Prince of Canino (1774–1840). By the end of the next year more than 3,000 painted vases had been recovered from buried tombs. Of course, this was not archaeology. It was more akin to vandalism and treasure hunting for valuable goods like painted pottery and gold jewelry. Many items considered worthless, like undecorated bucchero, fragmentary bronzes or skeletal material, were simply discarded or often smashed on the spot. It was only later, with the arrival of Alessandro François (1796–1857), Eduard Gerhard (1795–1867), and Adolphe Noël des Vergers (1804–1867) that something close to scientific archaeology began to develop.

This brings us to an historically significant time in the history of Italian archaeology and to one of the so-called fathers of Etruscology, Stéphane Gsell (1864–1932). Gsell became a member of the French Academy in Rome in 1886, when he was only 22 years old. With the encouragement and guidance of Auguste Geffroy (1820–1895), director of the Academy, and Jules Martha (1853–1932), one of the founders of modern Etruscology and author of the first true synthesis of Etruscan art, Gsell began excavations at Vulci on February 11, 1889 and ended them on June 1 that year. The excavations, as well as their eventual publication, were made possible with the financial support of Prince Giulio Borghese Torlonia (1847–1914), whose family then owned much of the Vulcian territory previously belonging to Lucien Bonaparte. The relevant documents supporting this complicated process were collected and discussed in an important article by F. Delpino ("Gli scavi di Stéphane Gsell a Vulci [1889]. La politica culturale dell'amministrazione per le antichità tra aperture internazionalistiche e autarchismo archeologico," *Bollettino di Paletnologia italiana* 86 [1995] 429–68).

Gsell concentrated his exploration of Vulci on three areas, north to south: (1) just west of the Ponte Badia across the River Fiora; (2) northeast of the Ponte Rotto and the François Tomb; (3) in the Polledrara necropolis, west of the Cuccumelletta tumulus. In part, these areas were determined by the property rights of the Torlonia family. Ultimately, Gsell excavated 136 tombs, most of which were undisturbed, representing the range of Etruscan chronology from Villanovan to Hellenistic, although the majority belonged to the Archaic period. These were expeditiously published in 1891 in what remains a prime example of meticulous, scientific archaeology, and the foundation for any research on Etruscan Vulci.

As one would expect, the catalogue (40–411) forms the major part of this volume. It is arranged in three sections according to provenience: items of certain provenience, i.e., from a specific tomb at Vulci excavated by Gsell (nos. 1–46);

items from non-Vulci proveniences, i.e., from Bisenzio and Polizzello (nos. 47–54); items of uncertain or unknown provenience (nos. 55–218). Most of this material comes from the Torlonia donation to the Pontificio Istituto Biblico made in 1911. Many of the pieces in the last and largest group are typical products of Vulci or its environs, and some may have come from Gsell's excavations, but because they were never carefully documented, this is uncertain. The situation is further complicated by a notation in pencil on many terracotta pieces: "Montopoli." This likely refers to Montopoli di Sabina, a town near which the Torlonia had one of their many villas. The material marked Montopoli was likely a part of the Torlonia antiquities collection housed at that villa and later transferred to the Institute in Rome. Of course, this does not help to establish an archaeological context for the material. A useful appendix (413–24) summarizes the basic catalogue data in a series of convenient tables. This is followed by a relevant bibliography (425–47).

The catalogue entries are models of meticulous scholarship and presentation. Each entry discusses provenience, material, condition, shape, decoration, and bibliography. In the case of pottery shapes, there are usually references to Gsell's famous typology charts (reproduced on 34–6). This basic information is followed by careful analysis of the dating and parallels. Multiple color photographs and excellent drawings document many of the entries. Pottery dominates the catalogue. If one combines the three sections and ignores the question of provenience, there are 43 impasto vases, 56 bucchero, 14 Etrusco-Corinthian, and about 60 small, utilitarian glazed vessels. Fewer than six examples exist for each of the following types: Italo-Geometric, Proto-Corinthian, Attic black-figure, Ionic, superposed red, Etruscan or Faliscan red-figure, and South Italian or Sicilian.

Only a few other types of objects are in the catalogue: a spindle whorl (no. 15), terracotta votive heads (nos. 207–8), lamps (nos. 209–11), undecorated bronze vessels (nos. 212–15), a stone weight (probably for a fishing net rather than a loom weight [no. 216]), and two pottery fakes (nos. 217–18), perhaps from the same early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian workshop. A third piece, a simple clay chalice (p. 139) associated with the few finds from Polizzello (nos. 50–4), also appears to be modern, although it may not have been an intentional forgery. The author suggests it may have been mistakenly incorporated into the Torlonia group donated in 1956.

The vast majority of vases catalogued are undecorated utilitarian objects of little aesthetic or archaeological significance, but there are a few exceptions. A large impasto lebes (no. 14) with vertical handles (with clay "rivets") still contains bone fragments and may have been used as a cinerary urn. Of the large selection of standard bucchero kantharoi and oinochoai, one kyathos (no. 24) stands out for its elaborate decoration and handle. It is likely a product of Tarquinia. There are a few Corinthian and Etrusco-Corinthian olpai (nos. 123–25) and two Ionic kylikes (nos. 133–34). For figural vases there are two fragmentary Attic black-figure

lekythoi (nos. 46, 135) and a late Faliscan kylix (no. 140) showing a winged nude female seated in the tondo.

Although primarily useful for specialists, this catalogue is good to have because of the material associated with the important Gsell excavations of 1889, as well as peripheral material from the Torlonia holdings, now carefully recorded and analyzed. This book, and no doubt future publications in the projected series, will add to our better understanding of the early history of archaeological exploration in Etruscan territory and the formation of private antiquities collections in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.