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Enigmatic (?) friezes on Praenestine *cistae*

L. Bouke van der Meer

This article offers an explanation for fourteen hitherto not (fully) understood, engraved main friezes on the bodies of Praenestine cistae showing apparently unrelated mythical scenes or figures. It considers important iconographic details, and uses visual comparanda and ancient literary sources. It will appear that engravers connected scenes or figures with a common ground. Association played an important role in their choice.

According to G. Bordenache Battaglia and A. Emiliozzi, editors of the corpus of Praenestine *cistae* (ca. 350-300/280 BC), many engraved main friezes on the bodies of these bronze toiletries boxes are generic (*Ciste* I.1; I.2), enigmatic or presenting misunderstood Greek or local myths unknown to us today. Generic scenes show several figures, often in a statue-like, paratactic, non-narrative, decorative composition. If inscriptions are present, they do not always label the figures with the correct name, which, at first sight, suggests misunderstanding (*Ciste* I.2, 296; Franchi De Bellis 2005, 162-163; Krauskopf 1993, 257-258). This article attempts to explain the content of some unexplained friezes. In the

following the numbers of *cistae* correspond to the catalogue numbers of the corpus.

The an-epigraphic frieze of *cista* 6 (fig. 1) in Berlin has never been explained completely (*Ciste* I, 55-56). Does it depict a meaningless series of figures? First a short description. It depicts from left to right: a frontal nude man with a mantle draped around his right arm and a frontal nude woman leaning on a pillar and looking to right, a semi-dressed woman turned to left, seated on a base or altar and extending her right hand, a frontal nude man leaning on his spear, a nude woman with a mantle draped over her right upper arm holding an inverted arrow in her left hand, running to left, a nude man lifting over his left shoulder a woman with a mantle draped around her left hand and moving to right, a frontal nude woman with a mantle which covers her head and back, leaning on a pillar, two frontal men, both with a mantle draped around their left arms, of whom the one on the right bears a baldric crossing his chest and a long spear in his left hand, and a nude female figure with spread wings holding a hammer in her right hand and nailing a boar's head on a palm-tree. Behind her stands a

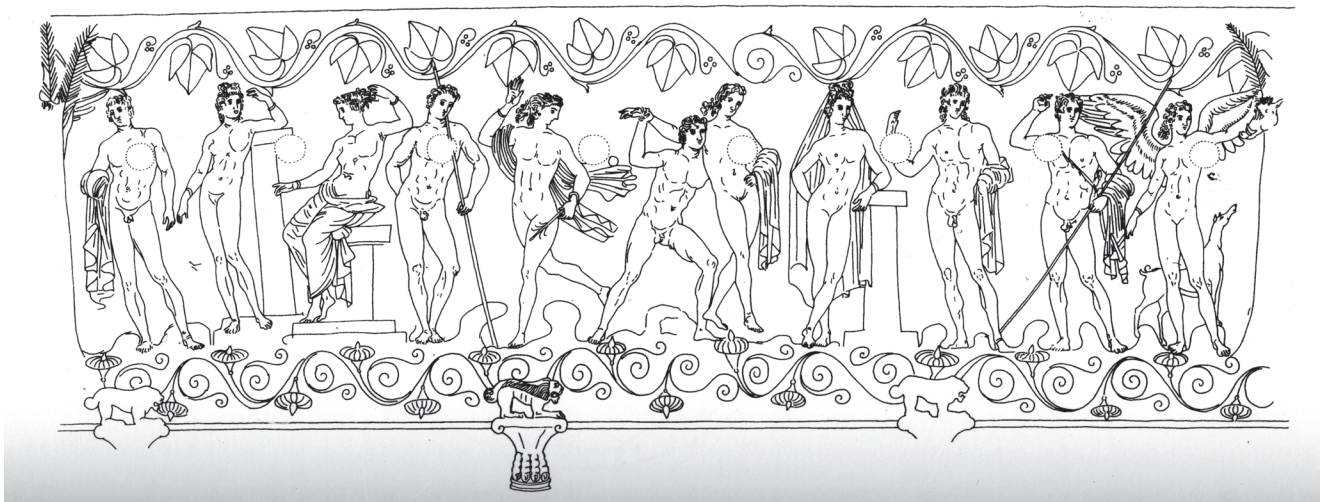


Figure 1 *Cista* 6 (from *Ciste* I.1)

LXXVIII.



Figure 2 Lost Etruscan mirror (from ES 78)

dog. Bordenache Battaglia compares the latter woman with Nike on Syracusan silver coins of king Agathokles (310-304 BC) where she nails armor on a bare tree trunk with a hammer in her right hand and a nail in her raised left hand. On the coins, however, Nike is bare to the hips, her wings hang down and the trunk is not the rest of a palm-tree. The palm-tree on the *cista* refers to victory. Sportsmen in the Greek and Roman world could receive a palm branch as prize. Since inscriptions on Praenestine *cistae* and mirrors are written in Latin or local Latin, I call the winged woman Victoria. The dog next to her played a role in hunting. Important for the identification of the mythological context is a famous inscribed Etruscan mirror from Perugia showing Adonis (inscription *Atunis* lost) and *Tu[ran]* (Aphrodite) on the left and *Meliacr* (Meleagros) and *Atlenta* (Atalanta) on the right (ES 176; Van der Meer 1995, 224-227, fig. 106). Between the love pairs stands a nude *Aθrpa* (Atropos: the Inevitable), one of the three Moirai who nails a boar's head on an invisible object. Her mantle is draped over her left upper arm. Like Nike on the coins she is semi-dressed and like Victoria on the *cista* her wings are spread. The function of *Aθrpa* is twofold: she alludes to the death of the boar and of two male hunters. Both Adonis and Meleager die respectively directly and indirectly in a boar hunt. In the myth of the Calydonian boar victory plays a role as Meleager kills the boar. As he gave its hide to his love Atalanta instead of to his mother's brothers, both he and Atalanta are likely to be present in the frieze. Bordenache Battaglia tentatively interprets the spear bearer just to the left of Victoria as Meleager and the man lifting a woman as an undefined abductor. The spear bearer, however, is not accompanied by a woman. Therefore, the pair to the right of the tree is rather representing representing Meleager and Atalanta. In addition, as the two men to the left of Victoria are rendered in the same attitude, with the same gestures and the same position of the mantles, they probably represent the Dioscuri, who, according to ancient written sources, assisted Meleager during the hunt (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.269- 546; Pseudo-Apollodorus 1.66; Pausanias 8.45.6; Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 172-174). They are also present in other *cista* friezes, though mostly with a horse. The veiled woman has a perfect parallel on a lost Praenestine mirror (ca. 330-300 BC), formerly in Munich (fig. 2; ES 78; LIMC II, s.v. Apollo/Apulu 81). It represents from right to left: Apollo seated on a stool and playing cithara, Diana, frontally rendered, standing in a relaxed way, dressed and holding her spear downward, and Latona seated with the mantle drawn over her head and back. The latter is dressed in the same way as the veiled woman on the *cista* (cf. Latona in *cista* frieze 70). The female figure with the arrow to the left of the abduction scene must be Diana. One of Artemis' epithets is *iocheaira* ('shooting arrows'), mentioned in Homer's

description of the Calydonian boar hunt (*Iliad* 9.538). The woman with the arrow cannot be Atalanta fleeing for Meleager's uncles as she does not carry the boar's head and skin. In addition, the uncles are absent too. The abduction probably depicts Apollo lifting up Meleager's future wife, Cleopatra, daughter of Idas and Marpessa (Homer, *Iliad* 9.559-561). These identifications show that, in this case, the juxtaposition of scenes can be explained by family relations. Therefore, it is not accidental that Latona turns her attention to her sons, the Dioscuri. Finally, the semi-dressed woman seated on a base or altar may be Venus. Atalanta probably makes the gesture of *apokopein*: she looks at the goddess of love. The latter extends her right hand, probably approving Meleager's falling in love with Atalanta. If my identifications are correct, the nude spear bearer behind Venus may be her partner, Mars. Why does the woman with the arrow, Diana, flee away? She punished the Aetolians by sending a giant boar because Meleager's father, king Oeneus, had sacrificed the yearly firstlings to all gods except to her. So the killing of the boar must have frustrated her. Menichetti does not identify the figures but holds that the frieze illustrates the *paideia* of men in view of the abduction, the presence of athletes (the two men to the left of Victoria) and hunting (probably related to Meleager) and it shows the *paideia* of women because of their beauty and seduction (Menichetti 1995, 72). He suggests that the seated lady fashions her hair with her left hand. However, there is no man to seduce. In addition, as we have seen, the two men are the Dioscuri assisting Meleager, not as athletes but as hunters as one of them holds a spear.

Interestingly, Atalanta is also present on the inscribed *cista* frieze 9 (fig. 3; *Ciste* I, 64-65). Facing a semi-dressed *Alixentr[os]* (Alexandros; Paris) who holds a laurel branch in his left hand, his left foot on a rock (like a haruspex, see Van der Meer 1995, 83-85, 89, 97-100) and offers a twig with his right hand, next to a basin which receives water from a lion head spout, there are three, nearly nude women: *Ateleta* (Atalanta) arranging her hair with her left hand, a woman labeled *Alsir* leaning against an altar or base, and *Felena* (Helena) whose name is written on the column pillar behind her. The attitude of *Ateleta* and *Alsir* slightly resembles the just identified Atalanta and Venus on the Berlin *cista*. Interestingly, Pliny (*N.H.* 35.17-18) mentions an old wall painting showing Atalanta and Helena, both nude: *Insula enim absoluta erat pictura etiam in Italia. exstant certe hodieque antiquiores urbe picturae Ardeae in aedibus sacris, quibus equidem nullas aequae miror, tam longo aevo durantes in orbitate tecti veluti recentes. similiter Lanivi, ubi Atalante et Helena comminus pictae sunt nudae ab eodem artifice, utraque excellentissima forma, sed altera ut virgo, ne ruinis quidem templi concussae. Gaius princeps tollere eas conatus est libidine accensus, si tectorii natura permisisset.* 'But

already, in fact, had the art of painting been perfectly developed in Italy. At all events, there are extant in the temples at Ardea, at this day, paintings of greater antiquity than Rome itself; in which, in my opinion, nothing is more marvellous, than that they should have remained so long unprotected by a roof, and yet preserving their freshness. At Lanuvium, where Atalanta and Helen, close together, nude, are painted by the same artist, they are both of the greatest beauty, the former (*altera*, see below) being evidently the figure of a virgin, and they still remain uninjured, though the temple is in ruins. The (emperor) Caius (Caligula), inflamed with lustfulness, attempted to have them removed, but the nature of the plaster would not admit of it' (translation by J. Bostol *et al.*, 1855, online). Pliny's text is interesting as it may imply that the painter left a signature. In addition, it may mean that Praenestine engravers found inspiration in monumental paintings or copies of them. E. Moormann (2011, 17) presumes that Atalanta and Helena were painted on separate panels though Pliny only states that they were painted on plaster. He also holds that Atalanta was depicted as an athlete. In view of Atalanta's prominent place on *cista* 9 this seems unlikely: she rather is a successful huntress. *Alsir* is a name with an unusual ending, maybe without parallel (*LIMC* I, s.v. Altria/Alsir (B.M. Giannattasio Alloero; in Umbrian *arsir* means (anyone) other). The engraver replaced the three goddesses of the Judgement of *Alixentros* by three women two of whom are mythical. The figures in the left part of the frieze are interrelated too. *Crisida* (Chryseis) holding a cup or *cantharus* and a bearded *Aias* (Aias) holding spear and shield, both turned to right, stand between two mounted, armed women dressed in short vests, *Casentra* (written from right to left; Cassandra) and *Oinumama*. As A. Franchi De Bellis points out, the name looks like the Latin compositum *unimammae* (Titian., *ap. Isid.* 9, 2, 64; Auct., *Itin. Alex.* 41; Jul. Val., *Rer. Gest. Alex.*

3, 50) and *Unomammiam* (Plautus, *Curc.* 445), 'with one breast', which is perhaps comparable with Greek *a-mazos*, 'without a breast.' In addition, the *pelta* of *Oinumama* is a frequent attribute of Amazons. *Casentra*, however, holds a *scutum*. Neither of the women shows one bare breast like Amazons in Greek art. The horses, both decorated with rosettes, move in opposite directions. Under the left horse there are a *scutum* and a dog, under the right one a hungry mouse and a frog. *Oinumama* is facing a nude man with a *chlamys* whose hat hangs down from his neck. The inscription behind him reads: *Alses*. A pillar decorated with a standing and a hanging branch stands between them. Also from the pillar beside *Felena* hangs a long branch. Cassandra, Chryseis, Aias and Amazons all play a role in the Trojan War. Agamemnon returns his beautiful war captive Chryseis to her father Chryses, priest of Apollo, threatening to take a female slave from Achilles, Aias (!), or Odysseus as compensation (Homer, *Iliad* 1.138-139). *Casentra* is depicted as an Amazon, probably because of her courage. She is shown with her back turned to *Aias*, probably as an allusion to her awful future fate: she will be raped by Aias. It is, however, not certain if Aias, son of Oileus or Aias, the son of Telamon, is meant. Amazons guided by queen Penthesileia assisted Priam, king of Troy, against the Greeks (*Aethiopis*, fr. 1 Allen; Arctinus, *Amazonis*). Enigmatic is the inscription *Alses* behind the man, who stands in front of *Crisida*, *Aias* and *Oinumama*. The vegetal decoration of the pillars, the rosette decoration on the horses¹, and the cup in *Crisida*'s hand intended for a drink or libation suggest a lucky *post mortem* situation like the scene in the lower part of the famous, inscribed Etruscan *Epiur* mirror (*ES* 181) where *Elinai* (Helena; enthroned) and *Azmenrun* (Agamemnon; standing) shake hands in the presence of *Aivas* (Aias) and *Elaxsantre* (Alexandros) crowned by *Mean* (a Victoria-like goddess), *Menle* (Menelaos) holding a

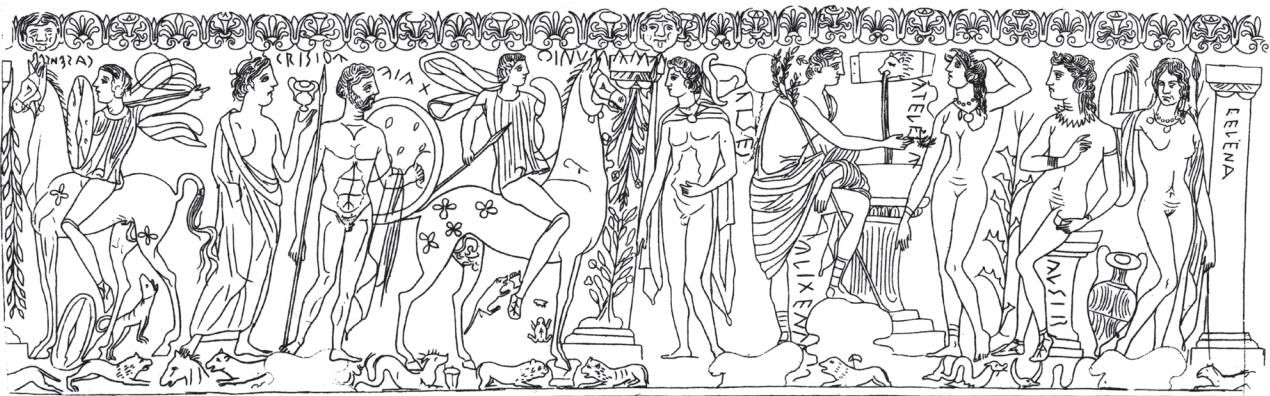


Figure 3 *Cista* 9 (from *Ciste* I.1)

libation cup and *Lasa thimrae*, a minor love goddess here probably associated with the Trojan Apollo Thymbraios. The scene is probably located on Leuke, an Elysian island in the Black Sea (Brendel 1978, 369-370, fig. 286. Van der Meer 1995, 92-97, fig. 38). *Alses* in the *cista* frieze may derive from Greek *alsos* ('sacred grove'). The change from Greek -*os* to Latin -*es* is attested by a Praenestine inscription reading Greek Amykos as *Amyces*. The word *alses* may refer to a grove in the underworld in view of the Medusa head in the upper border decoration, just above the pillar and the man with the *chlamys*. The place of Medusa's head is not unique. On the famous, inscribed *cista* 5 Cerberus in the decorative upper border sits right above the young *Mars* who, cared for by *Menerva* and about to be crowned by a large *Victoria* and a tiny one, is seated above a *dolium* with flames or a boiling liquid (wine?). If the *dolium* is an *orca*, it may symbolize Orcus, the Roman underworld (*Ciste* I.1, 50-54. Van der Meer 1988, 127). *Alses* may be a noun like *leges* (Latin *leges*: 'Laws') on a tag which hangs on a nail on the column on *cista* 45 (Franchi De Bellis 2005, 163). On *cista* 9 the branches on the pillars and the presence of a mouse and a frog also suggest a peaceful *alsos*-like netherworld. *Aiix*, son of Telamon, in the underworld is also present on a Praenestine mirror presenting Thetis, here labelled *Telis* (as the poet Ennius did later), giving Achilles's armour to *Aiix* in an act of posthumous justice (*ES* V 120; Adam 1980, 22 no. 4; Franchi De Bellis 2005, 85-88 (cites Varro's quotation of Ennius). According to De Angelis (2015, 96) *Aiix* substitutes Achilles which is unlikely in view of *Alcumena*'s presence). The setting is, as F. Coarelli suggests, the underworld since *Alcumena* (Alkmene) became the wife of Rhadamanthys, a judge of the dead, when she married for the second time (Coarelli, in *RMR* 1977, 275-276 no. 420, fig. 20). The interpretation is supported by the inscribed frieze of *cista* 101 (fig. 4) probably featuring *Aiix*

in the netherworld too (Franchi De Bellis 2005, 148-159). The frieze depicts from left to right, between columns: a nude young man labelled *Micos* (from Greek *mikkos* which means *mikros* ('little')) keeping two horses on reins, *Aciles* (Achilles) looking back to them and getting a helmet from *Victoria*, *Fercles* (Herakles), *Diesptr* (Diespater/Diespiter; Jupiter), *Iuno*, *Mircurios* (Mercurius) holding the balance of *psychostasia*, an almost nude man labelled *Iacor* (Iakchos? (Dionysos); Franchi De Bellis 2005, 158-159), holding a spear and bringing his hand to his mouth in amazement, and *Aiix* getting a helmet from *Iventus* (*Iuventus*), the personification of Youth. At first sight, the presence of *Diesptr* and *Iuno* suggests that the weighing of the souls takes place in the Olympic sphere before or during a battle. As, however, both *Aciles* and *Aiix* are depicted as men who respectively receive victory and youth, they are more likely in a post-war, posthumous situation. That would explain why *Mircurios*' empty scales are in balance.

Let us return now to the inscribed *cista* 45 (fig. 5). According to O.J. Brendel (1978, 359), its frieze does not tell a story. It shows from left to right: a satyr labelled *Silanus* who holds a *patera* and dances with a nude maenad, next to them is a semi-dressed woman labelled *Doxa* ('Glory') holding a dove, a frontal, dressed woman labelled *Ladumeda* holding a stag on a rein and leaning on a bearded herm, *Aiix Ilios* with a spear, holding two horses on reins in front of an Ionic column with a tag inscribed *leges* ('Laws'), a nude man viewed from behind, *Soresios* with himation, sheath and two spears, semi-dressed *Acmemeno* (Agamemnon) leaning on a base, two horse heads in a window, *Istor* a man in a short chiton and in a thoughtful pose, and *Lavis*, a dressed woman.

Bordenache Battaglia compares *cista* 45 with the an-epigraphic *cista* 82 because both friezes have the same decorative borders (*Ciste* I.1, 148-149). From left to right she identifies on *cista* 82 (fig. 6): *Aiix* with a horse, Achilles

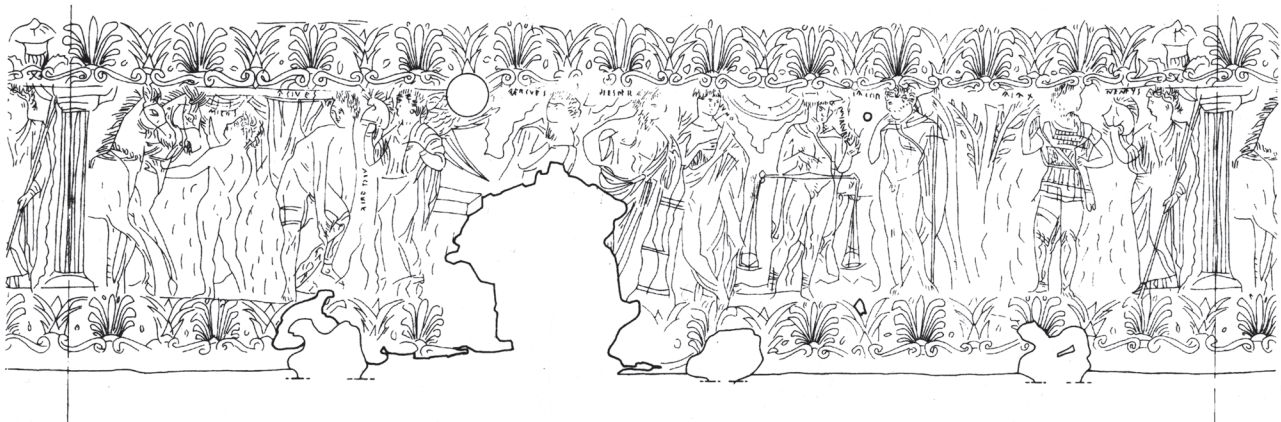


Figure 4 *Cista* 101 (from *Ciste* I.2)

mourning with his back turned to Iphigenia who denudes herself exposing her willingness to be sacrificed to Diana (cf. Eur., *Iph. in Aulis* 1397 ('I give my body to Hellas')). [H] *elena* denudes herself in the same manner as Iphigenia on *cista* 83; see below) by Calchas and a male assistant, who both wear a stippled dress and a Phrygian hat, a dog, a half open window showing a woman within, Agamemnon in almost the same pose as *Acemmeno* on *cista* 45, a frontal, nude spear bearer (Menelaus?), and a Dionysiac group consisting of a dancing nude man, a seated, flute playing silen, a woman upholding a mirror, and a panther. Bordenache Battaglia identifies *Soresios* on *cista* 45 as Achilles on *cista* 82, as both men hold two spears and are viewed from behind.

According to I. Krauskopf (1993, 252), the right part of the frieze refers to the chariot race in honour of the dead Patroclus. Key to her interpretation is Homer, *Iliad* 23, 486: *istoora d'Atreiden Agammona theiomen amphoo*. 'Let us both (Idomeneus and Aias) choose Atreus' son Agamemnon as judge.' Idomeneus quarrelled with Aias, son of Oileus (*Iliad* 23, 485-488; *Aiax Ilios* on the *cista*), about the question which of their chariots were in the lead. The Praenestine engraver did not understand the word *istoora*; so he labelled the person behind *Acemmeno* as *Istor*. *Istor* was, according to Krauskopf, Idomeneus in the original model. She tentatively presumes that *leces* is a writing error for *lebes*, a prize for the winner. *Lavis* from Greek *Lais*, a frequent name of *hetairai*, is one of the female slaves, who are destined for

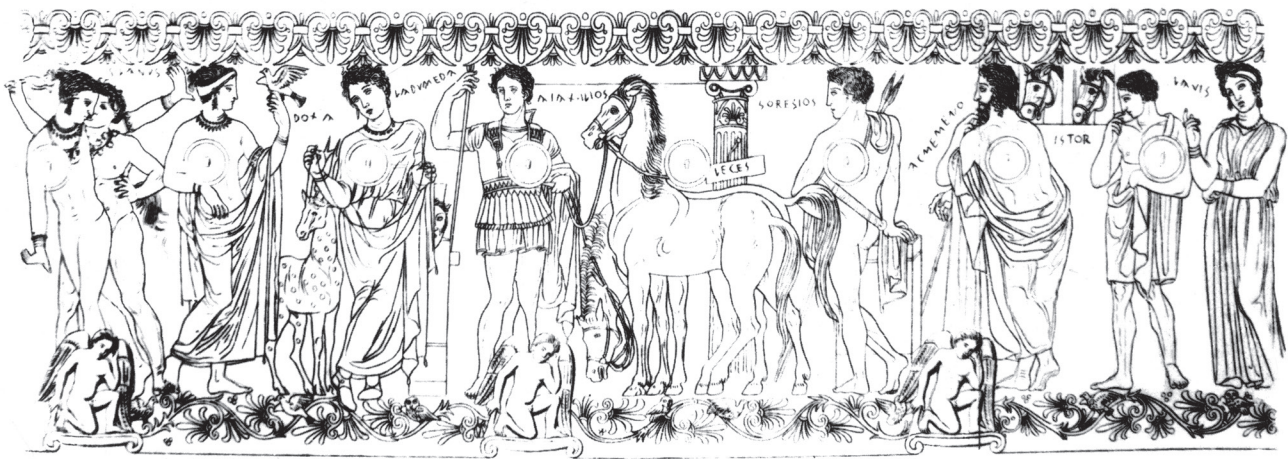


Figure 5 Cista 45 (from Ciste I.1)

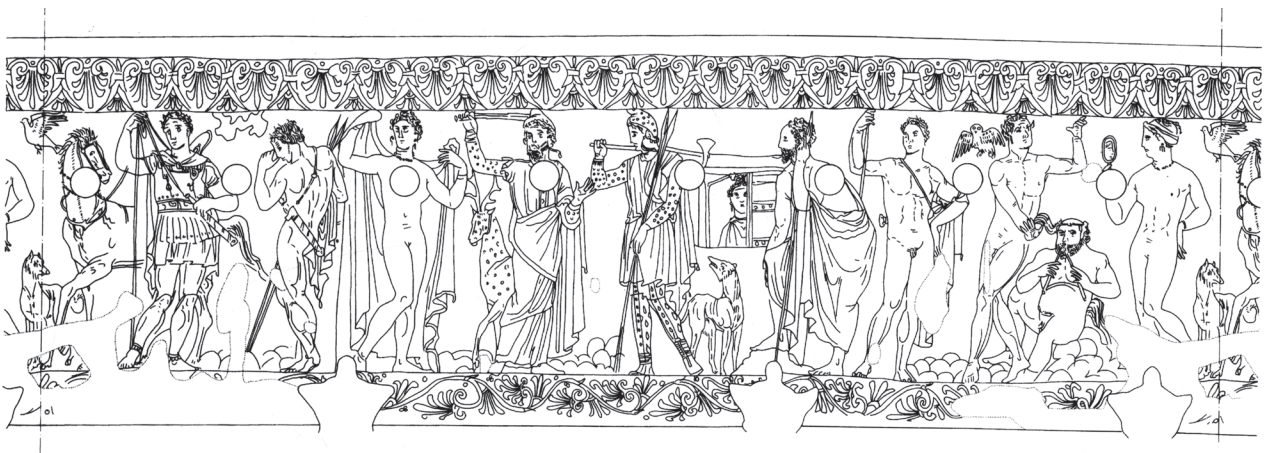


Figure 6 Cista 82 (from Ciste I.2)

the winner (*Iliad* 23, 261). Krauskopf does not explain the identity of *Soresios*. The rest of the frieze shows stock figures. A weak spot in her interpretation is the absence of a chariot and a *lebes*. In addition, she does not explain why the heads of the figures, including that of *Ladumeda*, are turned to left, toward *Doxa*.

According to Menichetti (1995, 118-119), the frieze does not tell a story but shows the fate of heroes 'in an afterworld sphere.' *Aiix Ilios*, a kind of *eques*, is a symbol of *virtus*. *Leces* ('Laws') in connection with *Istor* ('Judge; Umpire') are essential for the *paideia* of men. *Ladumeda* is Laomedea, one of the Nereids (Hes., *Theog.* 257) who gave new armor to Achilles. *Silanus* and the maenad allude to the *paideia* of women. This interpretation is not convincing as it does not explain the connections between the Greek heroes of the Trojan War.

Franchi De Bellis (2005, 160-164) comments on the inscriptions without explaining the whole frieze. Following E. Peruzzi she holds that *Soresios* is the paretymologic name of the sometimes young or androgynous rendered seer Teiresias, who had connections with (a man) Laios (cf. *Lavis*) and (a woman) *Historis* (cf. *Istor*). The change of sexes is due to confusion or misunderstanding. *Soresios* is compared with Latin *sero*, *sors*, and *sorex* (a priest who strings the *sortes* (lots)). Teiresias, however, has no role in the Iphigenia myth.

G. Colonna (2007 [2009], 127-128) holds that *Soresios* is the Latin version of Etruscan *Šuri-sie ('that (man) of Suri,' a deity comparable with the oracular and underworld god Apollo Soranus), another name for the seer Calchas who had to slaughter Iphigenia. Iphigenia, here labelled *Ladumeda*, probably to be compared to Laomedea, widow of Protosilaus, being an excellent example of conjugal love, and *Aiix Ilios* are famous judged from the presence of nearby *Doxa* ('Glory'). The inscription *leces* ('Laws') alludes to the violation of human laws by Agamemnon because of his order to sacrifice Iphigenia and it alludes to *Aiix Ilios* because of his raping of Cassandra. *Istor* ('Witness') is Aegisthus planning a murder in the same attitude as Medea does in a Pompeian wall-painting (*LIMC* VI, s.v. Medea 8). *Lavis* is Clytaemnestra who murdered Agamemnon (here labelled *Acmemeno*) or Lais, name of famous *hetairai*, symbol of adulterous love. The erotic, dancing group (*Silanus* and maenad) on the left is a positive counterpoint to the murderous lovers (Aegisthus and Clytemnestra) on the right. The horses in the window may be those of Agamemnon. Colonna's interpretation also has some weak spots. *Soresios* is an armed young man, who is not compatible with the old Calchas. As Bordenache Battaglia already noted, he probably is Achilles. *Ladumeda* is Diana rather than Iphigenia as she holds the rein of a stag.

In my view, the *cista* frieze combines the prelude and aftermath of the Sacrifice of Iphigenia. *Ladumeda* may be another name for Diana though Laodameia ('Leader of the folk') is not testified as epithet of Artemis. Euripides in his tragedy *Iphigenia Aulidensis*, however, frequently calls her *anassa* ('mistress'). I presume that *Ladumeda* derives from *Latonedā ('Daughter of Latona'), that is Diana. The name can be compared with *Crisida* which derives from the accusative of Greek Chryseis. The engraver, however, interpreted the name as a nominative, meaning 'Daughter of Chryseis.' The n > m shift in *Latonedā > Ladumeda is also visible in *Diama* on *cista* 5. *Soresios* is another name for Achilles. If the name refers to Šuri/Sorānus, it may hint at Achilles' foretold death: he will be killed by Paris and Apollo (Homer, *Iliad* 22.359-360). The dance of *Silanus* and maenad illustrates the happy ending of the tragedy. Core figure is *Doxa*, personifying the Glory of Iphigenia, as the latter, willing to die for Hellas, says in Euripides' tragedy (1397-1399): *didoomi sooma toumon Helladi. thuet', ekportheite Troian. tauta gar mnēmeia mou dia makrou, kai paides houtoi kai gamoi kai dox'emē.* 'I give my body to Hellas. Sacrifice it, destroy Troy! This is my enduring monument, my children, my marriage and my glory.' As *Lavis* is fully dressed, she does not look like a *hetaira*; she may have been Clytaemnestra in the original model. Her alternative name may hint at her future adultery. The fact that the pertaining lid of the *cista* shows a silen labelled *Ebrios* ('drunken') seated between a silen with a krater and a maenad with a whip both riding *kèrē*, does not mean that the figures of the main frieze are situated in an afterlife situation too. The windows in the friezes of *cistae* 45 and 82 show that they were indirectly inspired by paintings of South Italian red-figure vases with tragic and comic scenes (Schauenburg 1972; 1973).

In Bordenache Battaglia's view also enigmatic is the inscribed *cista* frieze 83 (fig. 7), though she notes that most names are related to the Trojan cycle. She suggests that the engraver may have seen *cista* 82 as [*H*]elena is disrobing like Iphigenia (*Ciste* I.2, 277-280). The frieze shows from left to right: a bearded semi-dressed man labelled *Tondrus* (probably Tyndareus) with a dog, a dressed man (damaged), a window of lattice-work, a young man labelled *Seciolucus* holding on rein a horse which is turned to right, *Creisita* (Chryseis) and [-]elena (*Felena* or *Helena*) flanking a basin under a lion's head spout, *Aciles* (Achilles) with spear holding on rein a horse which is turned to left, a nude man, labelled *Simos*, greeting him, carrying two yokes ending in bird heads with an oil flask and a purse on his shoulder, and a frontally rendered, nude young man, with *chlamys* and spear, labelled *Orestes*. Between him and *Tondrus* stands a tree. Menichetti (1995, 67-68), led by his *paideia* theory,

presumes that ‘the female beauty (of *Creisita* and *Helena*) leads to victory’ and that Achilles is an example of male *virtus*. Franchi De Bellis does not explain the meaning of the frieze but points out that Simos is a Greek slave name, and suggests that the name *Seciolucus* is a composite one, perhaps a previously unattested Praenestine *nomen gentilicium*. If she is right, the engraver wanted to compare a local horseman with *Aciles*. That may explain the symmetrical position of their horses. *Aucena* on *cista* lid 9 is a parallel if she is a local woman. In that case the engraver wished to compare or associate her with *Venus* (Franchi De Bellis 2005, 173-174). Of course, *Creisita* and *Helena* are

not only beauties but also the cause of grave conflicts that did not lead to female victories. *Tondrus* may have been placed at the far left and *Orestes* at the far right of the frieze as Tyndareus accused Orestes for having killed his mother, Clytaemnestra (Eur., *Orestes* 491-541; 915). Evidently, the rather symmetrical composition invites the viewer to compare the figures on the left with those on the right. The frieze seems to allude to the prelude and the aftermath of the Trojan War.

The inscribed frieze of *cista* 66 (fig. 8) depicts, according to Bordenache Battaglia, ‘a quiet flow of divine images with the right names, not united by a particular action’ (*Ciste* I.2,



Figure 7 *Cista* 83 (from *Ciste* I.2)

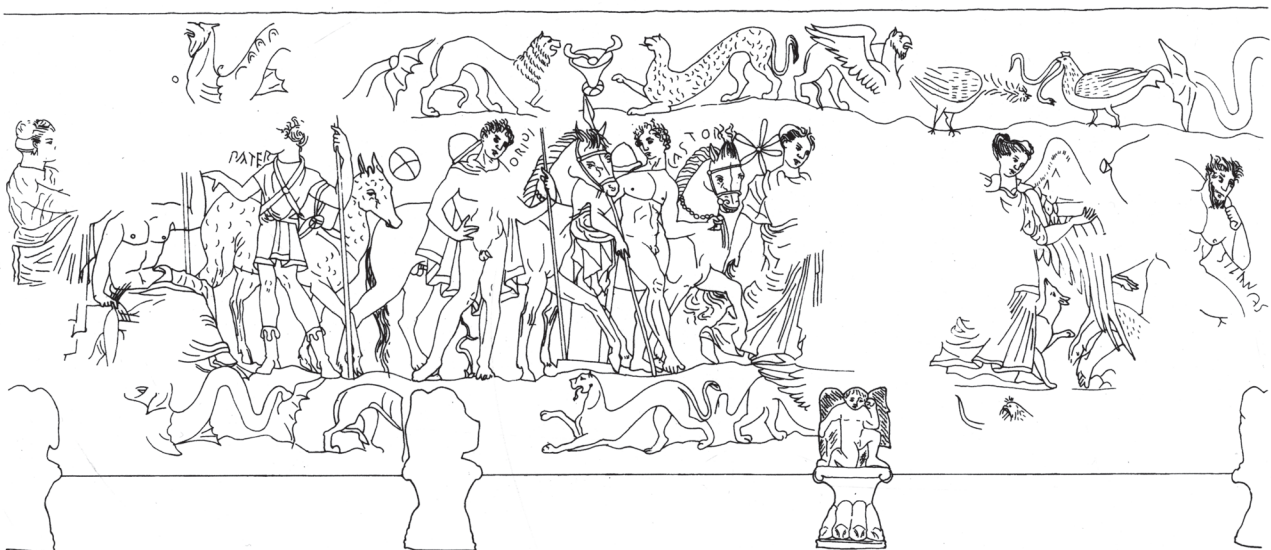


Figure 8 *Cista* 66 (from *Ciste* I.2)

66). It shows from left to right: a standing, dressed woman, probably Juno, a seated, semi-dressed [*Dies*]pater with scepter, [*Dia*][*n*]a talking to Diespater, rendered like a huntress with cross-belt and spear standing in front of a spotted hind, *Porlou[ces]* (Polydeukes/Pollux) and *Castor*, both with *chlamys*, *pileus* (set off), spear and horse, a dressed woman with a twig walking to right, ...? (gap in the frieze), [*Vi*][*c*]*tor*ia accompanied by a dog and holding a rectangular object in her left hand, and a bearded *Silanos* (Doric Greek Silanos), carrying a wineskin on his shoulder and dragging with him a dead goat. Menichetti (2005, 103-104) does not explain the frieze but, following Bordenache Battaglia, he presumes that the object in Victoria's hand is a rectangular *cista* like the unique *cista* 100. It is 'an allusion to a victorious omen which leads to a matrimonial aspect.' The object, however, has not the same form; it is a small box. It may be a jewelry case or *arca* containing *sortes* (lots). In the latter case, Victoria, to judge from her inclined head, is reading the omens. The frieze probably combines parts or excerpts of a more extensive model. The presence of *Diana*, the Dioscuri and *Victoria* with a dog (as in *cista* frieze 6) may refer to the Calydonian boar hunt. *Silanos* may allude to a happy ending, like the dancing *Silanus* and maenad on *cista* 45. His attributes, a wine bag on *cista* 66 and a *patera* on *cista* 45 (to play *kottabos*) were used during Dionysiac symposia.

The partly inscribed *cista* frieze 27 (fig. 9) depicts from left to right: Pollux (without inscription), meeting *Castor*, both with spear and horse, *Pater-poimilionum* ('Father of the pygmies/dwarfs'), with disordered hair, a rough beard and a large penis, a lion hide as *chlamys*, holding a *falx* and a club,

turned to left, Minerva with an aegis without Medusa head, holding lance and shield, a pillar on a base, a dressed winged female figure, probably *Victoria*, seated on a base or chest which is rendered in perspective, a mother and two nude boys who carry a plate and an oval *cista* toward a frontal, nude man with *himation* who makes an imperious gesture with his raised right hand in the direction of Minerva. The Dioscuri and the Father of the pygmies show *kunodesmè*, i.e. the foreheads of their penises bound with a leather thong. Bordenache Battaglia holds that all figures are generic, 'only chosen from a decorative perspective' (*Ciste* I.1, 108-10; for pygmies, see Harari 2004). According to Menichetti (1995, 79, 102-103) the mother with children and the nude man are married, their children bringing offerings to Minerva. The left part of the frieze refers to male *paideia* (athletics), and the right part to female *paideia* (marriage). Franchi De Bellis holds that the name *Poimilio* does not directly derive from Greek Pygmalion. However, she derives the Latin word *pumilio* ('dwarf') from *poimilio*. Both scenes, in my view, have comical elements: the Father of the Dwarfs is depicted as an athlete with the attributes of Hercules or Theseus (club) and of Priapus or Silvanus (*falx*) and the children who carry offerings are walking in the wrong direction. The nude man tries to correct their behavior by pointing to Minerva. *Victoria* may have a double function, alluding to the success of athletes, and to Minerva who protects the Dioscuri and children.

The left part of *cista* frieze 85 (fig. 10) depicts a woman with a pitcher and Tyro holding a bucket on a line to draw water from a well. The latter recognizes her sons, Neleus and Pelias, from the *skaphè*, a trough or baking mould with the



Figure 9 *Cista* 27 (from *Ciste* I.1)

signs of *anagnorismos*. According to Bordenache Battaglia, the right part of the frieze shows stock figures (*Ciste* I.2, 284-285. Menichetti 1995, 79-80. Gilotta 2002, 78 n. 131). From left to right there are a man wrapped in a mantle which covers his head, accompanied by a beast of prey, a dressed woman leaning on an altar, three young man, nude apart from their *himatia*, the first extending his right arm to the left, the second and third holding a spear, the latter, rendered in dorsal view, outstretching his right arm to the right. The mantled man and the woman at the altar, however, are not stock figures. The man may be Poseidon who watches, unseen, the meeting between Tyro and her sons like *flere* (*numen*) on an inscribed Etruscan mirror from Perugia in a very similar recognition scene. Above the well mouth *flere* arises as a male within an undulating frame that may refer to

the deity of water, Nethuns (Neptunus; Van der Meer 1995, 175, fig. 83). The altar scene is explained by what happened after the recognition, Pelias killing Sidèro, Tyro's cruel stepmother who had taken refuge in the sanctuary of Hera. If my interpretation is correct, the man to the right of the altar is Pelias whose imperative gesture may hint at his avenging of his mother's humiliation.

Cista frieze 91 (fig. 11) is unexplained so far (*Ciste* I.2, 297-299. Menichetti 1995, 101). Core of the scene is a semi-dressed, young man with scepter seated on a throne, looking back to a bearded man who hands over a letter to a woman who is draped in a mantle covering her head. The group may refer to the myth of Bellerophon. Stheneboea, wife of Proetus, king of Argos, tried in vain to seduce the exile and guest Bellerophon. After his refusal the queen

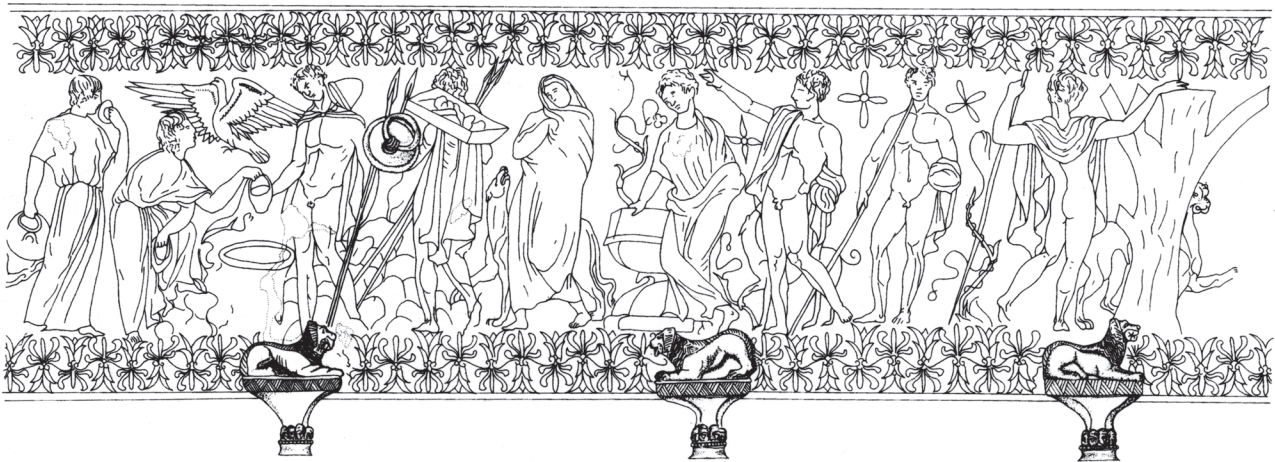


Figure 10 *Cista* 85 (from *Ciste* I.2)

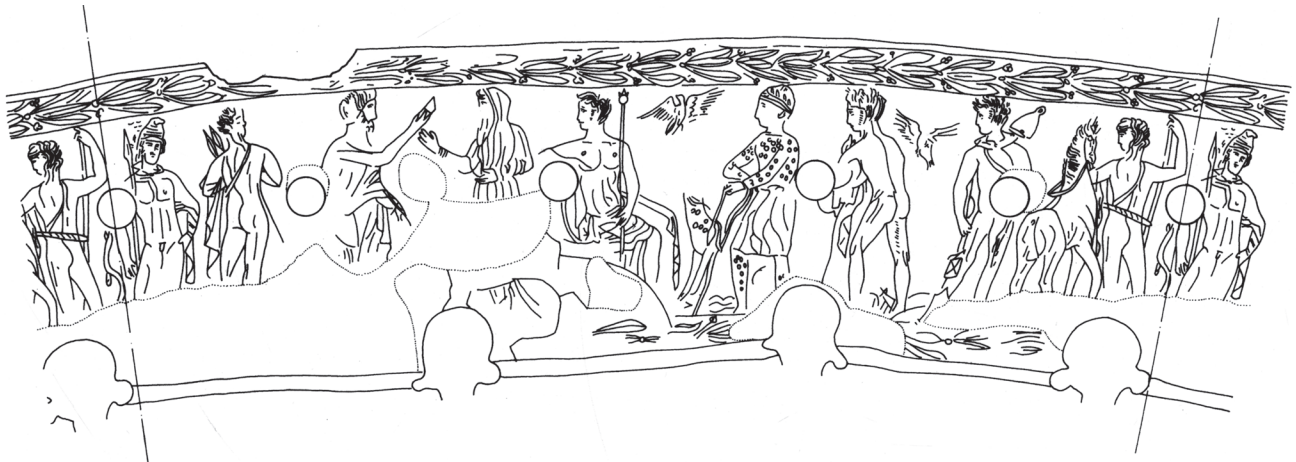


Figure 11 *Cista* 91 (from *Ciste* I.2)

accused him of having raped her. Proetus sent him with a sealed letter to Iobates, king of Lycia, with an order to kill him. In theory, the bearded man with the letter could be Proetus showing the letter to his wife. However, after having slain the Chimaera Bellerophon got half of Iobates' kingdom (Homer, *Iliad* 6.152-205), which may explain why he sits on a throne, holding a scepter. If correct, Iobates shows the letter or explains its content to one of his daughters, who will become the wife of Bellerophon. It explains why the woman is veiled. She may be visible on a Campanian red-figure krater from Capua, dated to ca. 350-330 BC, depicting Iobates, in Phrygian dress, holding a scepter, seated on a stool, and reading the diptych. Bellerophon stands in front of him accompanied by Pegasus. Behind Iobates probably stands his daughter who is veiled here too (A.D. Trendall, *LCS* 415 no. 360, pl. 167.5 (Winterthur, inv. 364)). Both are frightened by the content of the letter. In the *cista* frieze Pegasus is missing. The man facing the throne in Oriental stippled dress, leaning on a stick, however, may refer to Lycia.

Cista frieze 117 (fig. 12) depicts gods, warriors and women. U. Liepmann gives an excellent description but does not explain the meaning of the frieze (*Ciste* I.2, 397-414). Some details, however, contain clues for an interpretation. The center shows a young man seated on a throne which stands on a base decorated with undulating lines. He places his hand on the shoulder of a nude boy who stands with a whip in front of him. The whip may hint at Achilles as a future famous horseman. The waves may symbolize the sea. In that case Achilles may stand in front of his father Peleus, husband of Thetis, goddess of the sea. The quickly moving winged female on the left may be Thetis fastening with both hands Achilles' new armor to his body (cf. Thetis on *cistae* 55, 69 and 106). That would explain the presence of the

winged male figure behind the throne. He wears a loincloth and a tight cap with a knob that looks like a *pileus*; he holds an axe-like hammer and nail in his left hand. He may be Hephaistos who, asked by his daughter Thetis, made new weaponry for Achilles (*Iliad* 18.457-616). His wings are unique but four Attic black-figure vases depict him with winged feet and two Attic red-figure *kylikes* (ca. 510 BC) show him respectively seated on a winged chariot and on a chariot with winged wheels (*LIMC* IV, s.v. Hephaistos 3-44; for a possible winged Vulcanus with *pileus* on a pillar from Nijmegen, see Panhuysen 2002)). Though on the *cista* he wears, like Vulcan, a loincloth instead of the usual *exomis* (*LIMC*, s.v. Hephaistos 4) the working garb characterizes him as an artisan as can be inferred from *cista* frieze 12 showing a butcher and cooks, all males, working in the open air. Homer (*Iliad* 18.615-616) says that Thetis 'swooped like a falcon, from snow-topped Olympus, bearing Hephaestus' gleaming gift,' which explains the rush of the winged woman. Behind her stands Apollo with arrow and laurel branch. He caused the death of Patroclus (Homer, *Iliad* 18.453-456). In the right part of the frieze only Heracles can be identified thanks to his club and lion-skin. He is about to receive a libation from a dressed man holding a *patera*. It seems that the engraver added some Olympic gods to key moments of Achilles' life. The frieze may be one of the few where the protagonist appears twice which may point to a cyclic model like e.g. the two level frieze of the golden relief cover of a *gorytus* from Nikopolis, dated to the fourth century BC, which depicts Achilles three or four times. The *paideia* scene in the left corner of the upper frieze vaguely reminds us of the throne scene: Achilles as a nude boy stands on a rock learning how to use the bow from a man, not the centaur Chiron, who is sitting opposite him (*LIMC* I, s.v. Achilles 182).



Figure 12 *Cista* 117 (from *Ciste* I.2)

Cista frieze 76 (fig. 13) depicts Perseus, whose head is touched by Minerva as holds up the head of Medusa, and Peleus wrestling with Thetis who tries to escape him by changing herself into a lion and a *kètos*. Both heroes never appear together in a mythological context. The frieze, however, shows frightened figures: in the left part a boy clinging to his mother, and in the right part a draped woman spreading out her hands. So, the engraver's choice of the themes probably stems from amazement about two miraculous events.

As in the other *cista* friezes discussed (9, 83 and probably 106) comparison plays an important role. Repetition of motifs may indicate that an engraver was inspired by his association of different themes. The well known *cista* frieze 69 depicts the Judgment of Paris (Alexander), Laius' Abduction of Chrysippus, and a bearded warrior, maybe Laius again but older, consulting Apollo in Delphi. The themes are different; so why are they combined? Since Paris and Apollo are seated on the same type of stool (*diphros*), the engraver probably wished to compare two decision makers. This is corroborated by the laurel branch of *Alixentr(os)* (Alexandros/Paris) in *cista* frieze 9 who judges three female beauties near a basin (*labrum*): *Ateleta*, *Alsir*, and *Felena* (mentioned above). The laurel is a frequent attribute of Apollo (see *cistae* 5 and 69). Repeated on *cista* 69 is the motif of libation. Amor and Apollo both hold a *patera* in their right hand. Menichetti's suggestion (1995, 73) that Apollo's *patera* holds *sortes* is incorrect as these were preserved in an *arca*.

Another type of comparison is visible in *cista* frieze 52, which shows a nude Hercules with a raised club holding a staggering winged horse, probably Arion, and a nude man,

probably Bellerophon, holding the staggering Pegasus on a rein. Both horses move into opposite directions. The lion under the left horse refers to Hercules. An Ionic column stands between them. The heroes do not occur in a same mythological context, but the rather symmetric composition betrays the engraver's interest in fantastic horses. The semi-dressed winged Victoria-like man who looks back to Jupiter and Juno probably indicates the future success of both heroes. A comical addition is the head of a silen peeping from behind a rock.

Problematic is *cista* frieze 4. In the left part stands a couple in an intimate pose. The woman, holding a scepter, is veiled which indicates her married status. The man wears an Oriental dress and holds a sheath with sword in his left hand. Menichetti (1995, 104-105), following Bordenache Battaglia, presumes that they are Venus and Adonis. However, Adonis is almost never armed in visual representations. In view of his dress he must be Paris. So the woman is Helen. The man approaching them leading a horse is not one of the Dioscuri as Menichetti suggests but Paris' attendant. In the right part Jupiter with scepter, in front of an altar, and Diana accompanied by her sacred deer are approaching Dionysus (with *thyrsus*) who is seated on rocks. The link between both scenes may be that, according to ancient authors, both Dionysus and Paris were known as *gynaimanès* ('crazy about women'; *Homeric Hymn* 1.17 (1 D.8 West). Homer, *Iliad* 3.39 and 13.769). Why Jupiter and Diana visit Dionysus, however, does not become clear.

CONCLUSION

Cista friezes may have a generic meaning. However, my analysis of compositions, symmetry, groups, figures, drapery,

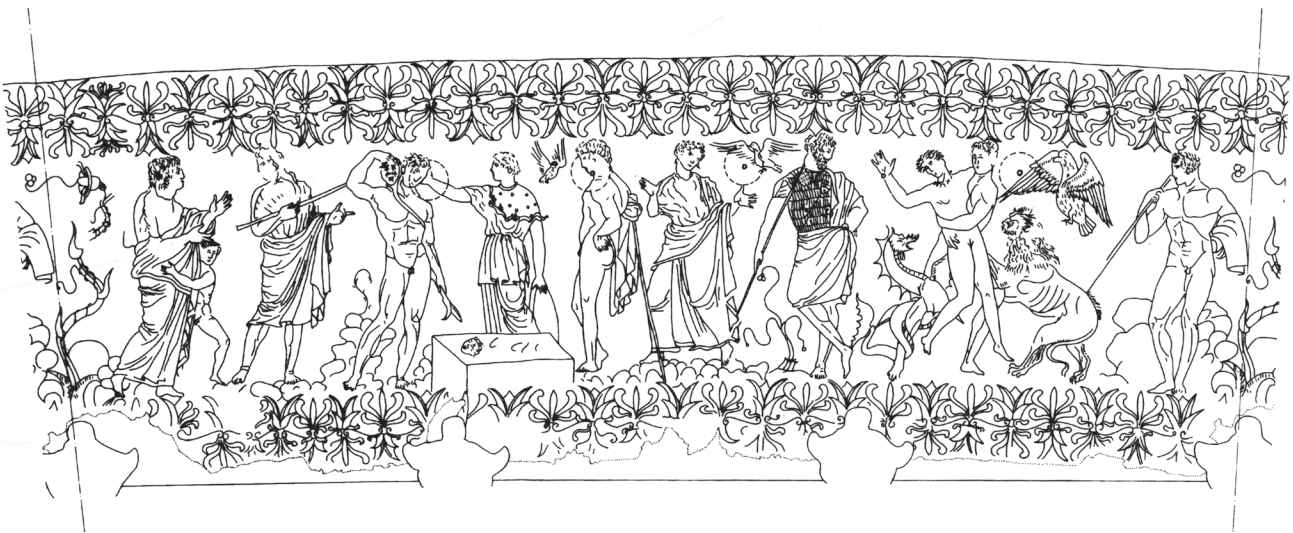


Figure 13 *Cista* 76 (from *Ciste* I.2)

attributes, movements, gestures, repeated motifs, and inscriptions may have shown that some of these friezes were meaningful to the engravers. They saw common features in the contents of different mythical scenes or different mythical figures and therefore connected these in one frieze. Associations are: family ties (Meleager), Trojan themes and figures (some in the netherworld), happy endings (Iphigenia, Bellerophon), comparison of beautiful women (Chryseis and Helen), comical elements (*Pater poimilionum*), and terrifying events (Perseus with Medusa's head; Thetis' metamorphoses). If the engravers discussed the choice of subjects with their commissioners, which seems likely, the latter understood the coherence and deeper meaning of friezes that, at first sight, are less transparent to us.

Notes

1 On the lid showing *Venus* and *Aucena* both riding a *triga*, rosettes are also visible on the horses of *Aucena*. The latter may be a Vesper-like, female deity as the two snakes under the chariot refer to the night or the underworld. Franchi De Bellis (2005, 173-4), however, holds that the name refers to a lady of the local gens *Aucenna or *Augenna. Anyhow, *Aucena* is not a man as G. Camporeale suggests (*LIMC*, sv. *Aucena*) because she wears under-arm bracelet. Apart from *Eros*/*Amor*, men on *cistae* and mirrors may wear a bracelet around the upper arm but not around the under-arm.

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