

RATTLING AMONG THE ETRUSCANS AND GREEKS

Tom Rasmussen

History of Art Department, The University, Manchester M13 9PL

In the early 1970s when I was a graduate student making a study of Etruscan pottery, I picked up a bucchero cup from Veii in the old Museo Preistorico in Rome and drew it.¹ As I handled it it spoke to me, that is to say it rattled when I shook it. As the museum was on the point of moving its location there was little more I could do at the time; all the material was immediately taken to the new Museo Pigorini at the Esposizione Universale di Roma where it remained packed away in boxes for many years.

A year before that encounter the first Greek rattling cups were published. Several are now known in Athenian black-gloss pottery, and the series begins in the first half of the fifth century BC. Among the earliest is a Type C in Oslo. All these fifth-century cups have a hollow groove inside the foot around which clay pellets move freely, and in the case of incomplete cups the groove may be the sole indicator.²

Fourth-century Greek rattlers are deeper cup-kantharoi with a thick hollow lip for the pellets. The greatest ancient authority on different types of cup is Athenaeus, and it was Brian Shefton who, in studying the Athenaeus passages, spotted that rattling cups are mentioned there, described by the comic poet Euboulus as *psephoperibombetrios* - 'pebble-rattling'.³ So this somewhat rare and bizarre phenomenon has its place in the literary record. Euboulus was writing in the fourth century, and it is presumably the cup-kantharoi that he has in mind.

To return to the cup from Veii (Fig. 1), it is of an unusual form with notched carination and central omphalos. There is only one other example similar, from Cerveteri,⁴ and that one is totally silent however hard you shake it. Both are from tombs and their contexts are early, much earlier than the Greek cups: later seventh or early sixth century. Recently I obtained X-ray photographs of the Veii cup (Figs. 2, 3) for which I have to thank Elisabetta Mangani of the Pigorini Museum, who also supplied a new drawing (Fig. 4). There are only two or three pellets and they do not move around the circumference of the lip or foot as in the Greek examples but are contained in a void at the top of the stem and omphalos.

When I was taking the photograph of Fig. 1 one of the assistants in the Pigorini storeroom handed me another mesomphalic cup from a different shelf and that too rattled (Fig. 5). This also is of an unusual form and with its inward-leaning lip is not unlike a Greek lekanis, apart from the small stemmed foot. Of a refined grey impasto, it is unpublished and the inventory states merely that it was acquired at Chiusi.⁵ The X-ray (Fig. 6) shows up more and smaller pellets this time, moving about in a larger void similarly positioned. On the underside of the foot there is a small hole, presumably a vent-hole to assist in firing, a feature which some of the Greek cups have, including the one in Oslo. With no close parallels and without any context the date is far less certain here, but I imagine from the stemmed foot that the cup belongs to the late sixth or fifth century.

What are we to make of these vessels? Is the rattling phenomenon the result of an exchange of ideas between Etruscans and Greeks, akin to others that occurred later in the trading of pottery and metalware?⁶ Who is borrowing from whom?

To make the cup sound you have to move it. The best-known context in which cups were moved at speed is the game of kottabos; here a finger is placed through the horizontal U-handle and, by a flick of the wrist, dregs of wine are ejected at a target across the room. Commonly depicted on Athenian pottery it has been aptly described as a game 'beloved of rich young Athenian louts', but its appeal was pan-Hellenic and Athenaeus, writing c. AD 200 - for whom it was of antiquarian interest, a pastime enjoyed by men of old (*hoi palαιοi*) - tells us at least three times that it was the Sicilians who

invented it, while according to a fragment of Alcaeus by the early sixth century it had already reached Ionia.⁷

Certainly the game was popular in the Greek west, and from here come some of the most memorable depictions of it, mainly on fourth-century South Italian vase-scenes such as Python's actors, but beginning in the previous century with the Tomb of the Diver at Paestum. Rattling cups were made here too, and Vickers mentions a South Italian skyphos in Lyon with pellets in the hollow lip (on the authority of D. von Bothmer). But representations in Etruscan art take us back to the later sixth century, and the image in the Cardarelli Tomb at Tarquinia is among the earliest of all.⁸ Is it from here that the Greeks took the ideas of kottabos and the rattling cup?

It is tempting to link the rattling cup with the drinking game for they both span very much the same period of time: from c. 600 BC into the fourth century. But the connection will always be beyond proof, and where the two Etruscan cups are concerned there is a feature which they share that makes a link with kottabos less likely. In a fit of early experimental archaeology Hayley⁹ apparently attempted to recreate the game using rough-and-ready modern equipment; it would be more informative to use the ancient cups, though it might be difficult to find a willing museum curator. However, I suspect that the omphalos would prove fatal to any accurate throw, for instead of the dregs being collected neatly at the bottom of the cup they would be dispersed. (Vickers¹⁰ would also see an obstacle in the offset lip, though in fact lipped cups and skyphoi are frequently represented in kottabos scenes). Omphaloi are extremely rare on Etruscan cups; they essentially belong to another shape altogether, the phiale, of eastern origins, which in the Etruscan and Greek worlds is primarily a vessel for making libations.

Etruscan metal phialai had a wide reputation in antiquity, and are the one Etruscan vessel - the phiale of beaten gold (*chrysotypos*) - specifically mentioned in Greek literature.¹¹ Greek metal rattling phialai are also known from the late Archaic period, in the form of a matching silver mesomphalic pair in New York with miniature hollow Persian heads on the exterior in which bronze pellets had been inserted.¹²

Is it possible then that the omphalos denotes a votive use for the Etruscan cups? This is the use which Vickers suggests for the Greek rattlers, noting that the context of the Euboulus passage is one of reverence to Zeus Soter. But there are a number of arguments against. First, in pouring a libation there is no cause to move the vessel sufficiently to make it sound. Then the fixed notion of the phiale as solely a vessel of libation is insecure, as in a number of banquet scenes in both Etruscan and Greek art it is used as if it were any handled cup (though in representations it is impossible to know whether it is mesomphalic or not). Seeberg¹³ reminds us that the Euboulus fragment is from a comedy, and the description of making a solemn dedication with a 'pebble-rattling' cup may have been to raise a laugh. One could also argue that the rattling phialai in New York were themselves made as a joke, with their conceit of human heads rattling like empty vessels, a very costly joke at the Persians' expense.

Cups are not the only things that were made to rattle in early Italy. Simple pottery (impasto) rattles serving as toys or musical instruments are also known; in Early Iron Age Latium they have been found at Osteria dell'Osa in both child and adult graves, and it is conceivable that rattling cups may owe their origin to artefacts such as these. Also from Latium are the rattling vessels from Ficana of the second half of the seventh century BC, where clay balls sounded in the hollow knob of the lid. These are lidded pyxides, but in the context of the banqueting set with which they were found it is likely they were used as containers for food.¹⁴

At Ficana the pyxides were found in a domestic context. The bucchero cup from Veii is from a tomb-group, and among the other contents are three more bucchero cups (of Greek shapes), seven bucchero kantharoi, an impasto chalice and two jugs (one bucchero, one painted). It looks very much as if the deceased's drinking set was included. If the two New York rattling phialai are indeed from

a 255-piece hoard recovered from four tombs near Sardis, as has been claimed,¹⁵ then the nature of the associated pieces - kyathoi, strainers, oinochoai - suggests that they too formed part of drinking services, only here on a luxury scale. (The phialai are the only metal rattling vessels so far known, but one wonders whether the rattling phenomenon did not originate in metalware; for one thing, you would get a louder rattle.) The only other archaeological context for a rattling vessel is votive: a black-gloss cup comes from the recent excavations at the Aphaia sanctuary on Aegina, its foot broken and the pellets found separately. But the inscription mentioning Apollo on the rattling foot of a Greek cup in a private collection appears not to be a conventional dedication.¹⁶

The finds from Ficana show that rattling vases in the ancient Mediterranean are not confined to drinking vessels, but in most cases where the archaeological context is known there does seem to be a strong link with drinking and banqueting. The solution to the use of such vases may be that they did not figure prominently during the banqueting so much as afterwards when, in the Greek and Etruscan worlds, drinking was often followed by energetic dancing (the Greek *komos*).¹⁷ It may seem strange to us today that the dancers frequently carried pots as they cavorted, but anyone who has seen the antics of dancers swinging and balancing pots and bottles at festive occasions in Arab countries of the Mediterranean would feel less surprise. At any rate Greek, especially Athenian, vase-paintings are full of drunken dancers clutching pots of all sorts, usually cups but also other shapes¹⁸ such as kraters and jugs, in fact almost any vessel that came to hand. Doing silly things with vases is also featured in a number of dancing scenes in Tarquinian painted tombs: a cup is carried above the dancer's head in the Tomba della Fustigazione; another is prominent in the Tomb of the Leopards;¹⁹ while on the back wall of the Tomb of the Lionesses a frenzied dancer rushes forward with a jug.²⁰ The archaeological record tells us that most of these vessels would have made no sound, but I suggest that a few potters did on occasion adapt their pots with this particular use in mind, so that in the vase-dance the interior pellets would add percussion to any rhythmic shaking.

There may not of course be a single solution to the use of these vases, and it is always possible that some of them may have been intended for purposes of which we have no idea, others for dancing, others again for kottabos. However, the visual excitement generated by the kottabos game would surely have been sufficient in itself; an additional aural element seems superfluous. There are, moreover, no indications that the introduction of kottabos antedates the adoption of eastern-style banqueting couches in Greece, for which there is no visual evidence before the end of the seventh century BC.²¹ But the rattling vases from Veii and Ficana may well belong in the era of the earlier style of seated banquet which also originated in the Near East, and which in its Greek form with Greek-style cups and wine containers was later introduced into Central Italy,²² the idea of banqueting couches arriving here (from Greece) later still in the first half of the sixth century BC. This new-fangled Greek banqueting equipment may already have included rattling vases for the vase-dance, of which a few craftsmen in Etruria and Latium took sufficient note to copy the idea for themselves.

NOTES

1. Excavated at the Picazzano cemetery in 1889 (Palm 1952: Tomb 20, pl. 7.16); drawing in Rasmussen 1979, 121, fig. 235.
2. First publication of rattling cups: Shefton 1970; Vickers 1970. Type C: Seeberg 1972. Incomplete examples: Vickers 1973.
3. Fourth century examples: Shefton 1970. 'Pebble-rattling': Athenaeus 471d.
4. Rasmussen 1979, fig. 234.

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5. Inv. 24929. 'Chiusi, acquisto Giovanni Brogi 1882.' Max. ht. 6.3cm. Max. diam. 12.00cm. There are traces of four horizontal lines on the lower bowl in dark paint.
6. Rasmussen 1985.
7. Kottabos: Hayley 1894; Sparkes 1960. Athenian louts: Spivey and Stoddart 1990, 149. Alcaeus: in Athenaeus 481a.
8. Python: Trendall 1989: fig. 372; Lyon skyphos: Vickers 1970. Tarquinia: Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983, pl. 94. Later Etruscan kottabos scenes, see Steingraber 1984, 343 (Tomba Querciola 1, back wall); Beazley 1947, 114, pl. 27.9 (red-figure cup tondo).
9. Hayley 1894.
10. Vickers 1970, 200.
11. Critias, in Athenaeus 28b.
12. Bothmer 1984, 6, 24, nos. 16, 17.
13. Seeberg 1972.
14. Osteria dell'Osa: Bietti Sestieri 1992, 131; Ficana: Rathje 1983, 16, fig. 5k. (I am grateful to Annette Rathje for a full-scale drawing.)
15. Kaylan 1987.
16. Aegina example: pers. comm. Dyfri Williams; Apollo inscription: Vickers and Jeffery 1974.
17. On the banquet/symposium komos in Greece, see Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 231 ff.
18. One of the many examples is the Euergides Painter's cup in Paris: Lissarague 1987, fig. 16.
19. Tomba della Fustigazione, Tomb of the Leopards: Steingraber 1984, pls. 73, 106. Other Tarquinian painted tombs with dancers wielding cups: T. Citharode, T. Inscriptions, T. del Morto, T. Painted Vases, T. 5591 (Steingraber 1984, 307, 319, 330, 358, 374).
20. Steingraber 1984, pl. 100.
21. Dentzer 1982, 56.
22. Rathje 1990.

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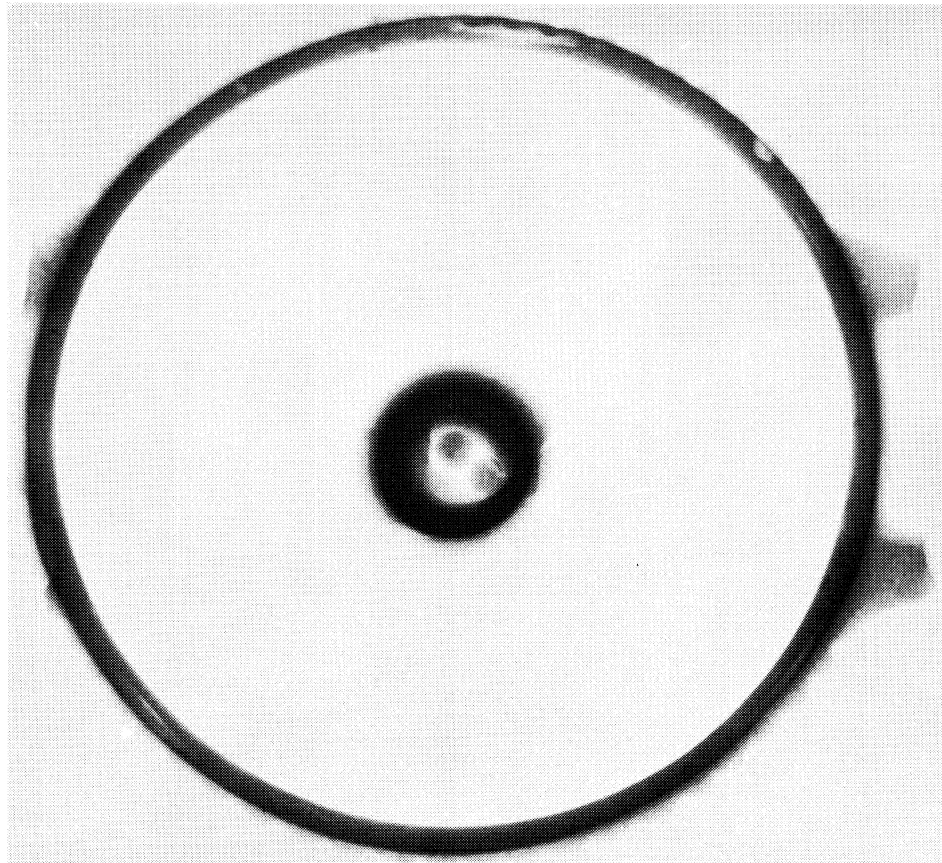
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Illustration credits

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| Figs. 1, 5 | T. Rasmussen |
| Figs. 2, 3, 6 | Photograph Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome |
| Fig. 4 | Drawing G. Calandra |

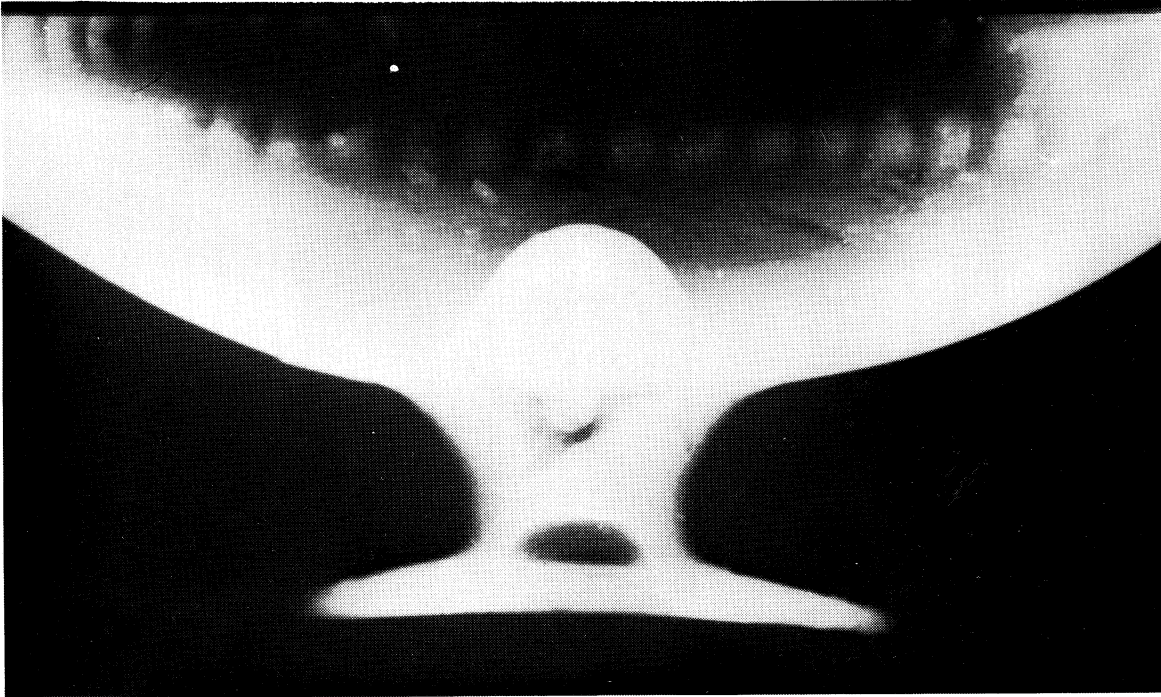


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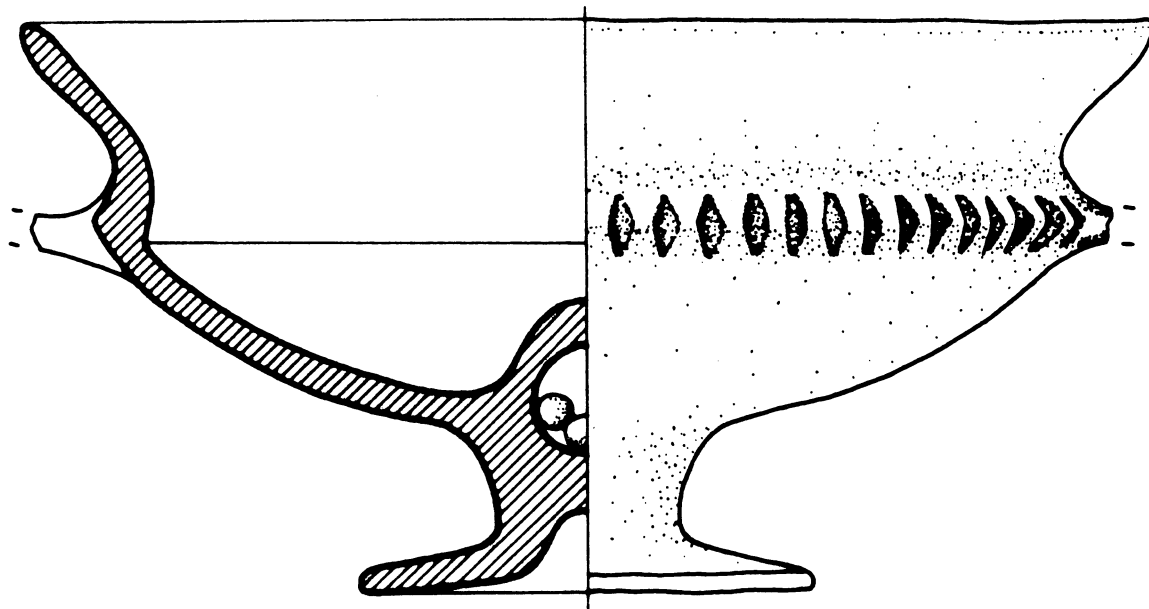


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- Fig. 1 Bucchero cup from Veii (Picazzano), diagonal view from above, Museo Pigorini (Rome, EUR) inv. 70823
- Fig. 2 Bucchero cup from Veii, (Picazzano), X-ray from above, Museo Pigorini (Rome, EUR) inv. 70823. Photo Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome



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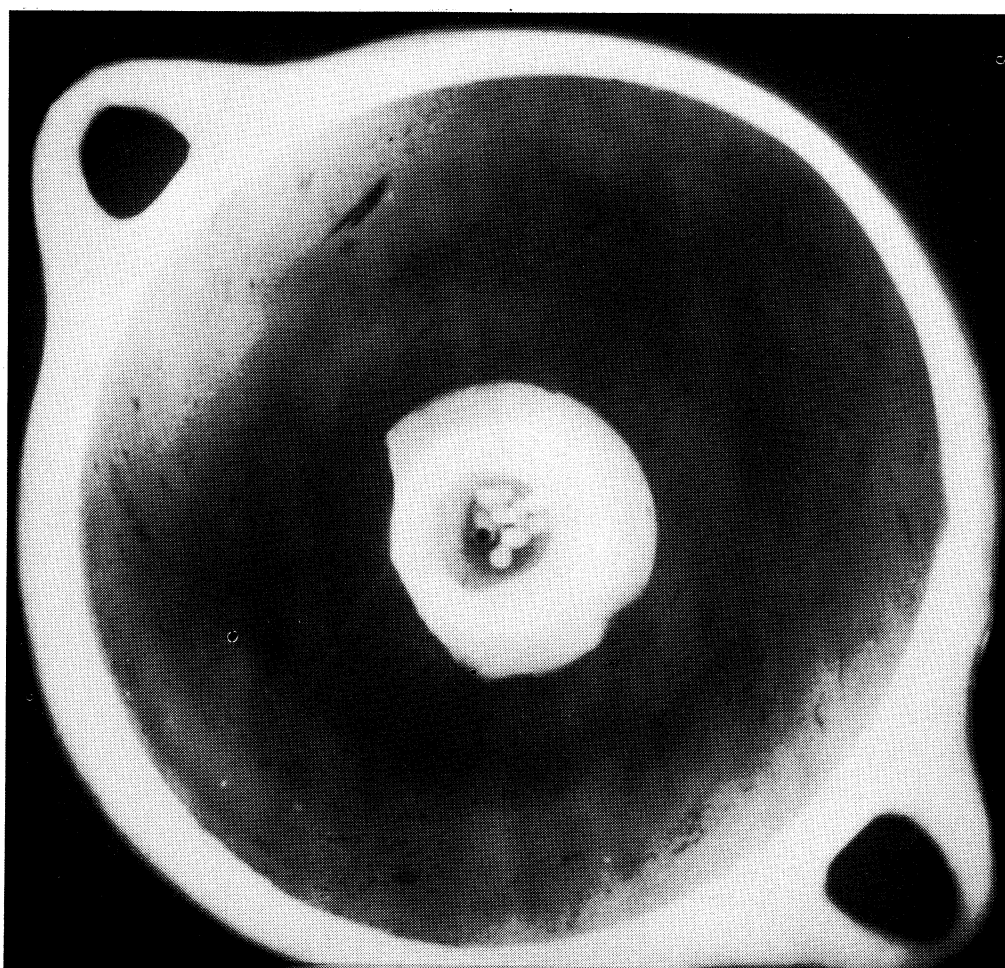
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Fig. 3 Bucchero cup from Veii (Picazzano) X-ray from side, Museo Pigorini (Rome, EUR) inv. 70823. Photo Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome

Fig. 4 Drawing of bucchero cup from Veii (Picazzano). Drawing G. Calandra



5



6

Fig. 5 Impasto cup from Chiusi, view from side, Museo Pigorini (Rome, EUR) inv. 24929

Fig. 6 Impasto cup from Chiusi, X-ray from above, Museo Pigorini (Rome, EUR) inv. 24929.
Photo Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome