

A votive bronze plate decorated in Situlae art style from Rovereto in the Antiquity Museum of Turin

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ABSTRACT - The picture of a man standing behind a charioteer on a ceremonial chariot and the logical link with the use of a votive plate suggest the identification of a moment of awarding of prizes of horse races in Iron Age Veneti rituals, with comparisons in Situlae Art and in Greek use, in which the owner of the winner horse makes his honour lap.

KEY WORDS: Situlae Art, Ex voto, Iron Age, Chariot

PAROLE CHIAVE: Arte delle Situle, Ex-voto, Età del Ferro, Carro

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The find was bought in 1881 by the Direction of the Museo di Antichità di Torino, by the will of Ariodante Fabretti, together with other articles, which were chosen, co-ordinated and financed by the Consorzio Universitario, an association purposely established for enhancing the collections of the Turin Museum. A certain Mr. Alessandro Foa, a Jewish expert collector and dealer in antiques, sold it on 26/10/1881. Mr. Foa was the trustworthy supplier also of other groups of findings mainly from Piedmont and stated that the votive plate actually came from Rovereto in the Province of Trento (and was not only acquired there). The fact that in the inventory it is marked as coming from "Rovereto in the Tyrol" is precise and rather unusual as the Consorzio Universitario was mainly interested in buying pieces from Piemonte or from the Italian territory (which Rovereto belonged to only in its irredentist aspirations) and therefore it would not have been advantageous to declare the locality of origin if it were not true. The price paid for it was L.65 which was quite a conspicuous amount (it corresponded to a complete set of gravegoods of average wealth of the Golasecca Culture sold in the same

Time by C. Marazzini) considering the state of conservation and its dimensions. It must have been Fabretti's will to buy it at a moment when researchers and experts were particularly interested in the phenomenon of the Situlae Art (G.GHIRARDINI's first volume in the *Monumenti Antichi dei Lincei* is dated 1893).

1. DESCRIPTION

Rectangular bronze laminate plate, 6.5 cm high, max. length 6 cm (total length is presumed to be about 11 cm). There is a hole in the upper part as when it was bought (and it is visible in the first photos) had the remains of a bronze nail with a circular section and a flat head. The usual 'embossment' technique preceded by a burin engraving on the outline is used to represent a two-wheeled chariot hauled by two horses (incomplete) with the charioteer and a person standing on the foot-board holding on to the edge of the two-wheeled chariot with his hands.

2. COMPARISONS OF CHARIOTS AND TWO-WHEELED CHARIOTS IN THE SITULAE ART IN THE VI-IV CENTURY

a) Situla from Vace (VI century BC) (Situlenkunst 41:115, tabl.32-35). At the top of the first register there is a parade with a two-wheeled chariot with charioteer and another person, a cart with two people sitting on it, three people on horse back and two people on foot pulling two horses by the reins.

b) Situla Arnoaldi (end of VI century-first half of V century BC) (Situlenkunst 52:121, tabl.48-49). At the top of the first register there is a four two-wheeled chariot race; on winning the first charioteer stops in front of a person raising his arm in the air (the “umpire”?). Behind, a person is about to step onto the foot-board of another two-wheeled chariot, driven by a charioteer, followed by a duel with *halteres* and a helmet in the centre:

c) Situla from Toplice (first half of V century BC) (Situlenkunst 45:117, tabl.40-41) Incomplete: towards the top of the first register there is a parade with a two-wheeled chariot and a charioteer and a person with a stick stepping onto the foot-board, at least one horseman and at least one horse pulled by its reins by a person on foot.

d) Situla from Kuffarn (second half of V century-beginning of IV century BC) (Situlenkunst 54:122, tabl.50-53). In the only register, a five two-wheeled chariot race, with the first charioteer turning round as he wins, together with two horsemen who are racing and other scenes.

e) Moritzing cist (from a tomb of the end of the IV century) (Situlenkunst 39c:114, tab.30). Fragmentary and incomplete: in the only register, a parade with at least one two-wheeled chariot and a horse pulled by its reins by a man can be vaguely distinguished.

3. COMMENTS AND ICONOGRAPHICAL INTERPRETATION

Notwithstanding the precise publication in 1897 by Serafino Ricci, who succeeded Fabretti as Director of the Museo di Antichità, and even though there was no doubt about the place of origin, this interesting piece of evidence of Situlae Art has never been analysed in the most important bibliographies on this subject. In fact, even though it is fragmentary, the dating of this finding can be

easily traced back to the VI century BC by comparing it to a similar representation on the Vace situla and taking into consideration aspects such as typology, iconography and style; there are only subtle differences regarding the faces of the people and the head dress recall some of the characters of the Certosa situla.

It is an *ex voto* (proved by the remains of the bronze rivet used as a suspension item) and the object could have something to do with the winning of a chariot race or some other races: in examining this piece an iconographic and exegetical comparison can be made with other representations of the Situlae Art. In fact, considering the votive practice, it is difficult to imagine that the artisan who actually made the plate worked very far from the site it was found on or far from the original sacred area.

With the only exception of the Benvenuti situla which presents a different chronology and narrative context, the list of comparisons is evidence of the frequency and of the schematic repetition in which the two-wheeled chariot appears in the Situlae Art. The difference between two-wheeled chariots for racing (which are well represented on the Kuffarn and Arnoaldi situlae), the cart on the Vace situla and the parade chariot pulled by a charioteer on the Vace, Toplice and Arnoaldi situlae, and on the specific votive plate is evident. The ceremonial importance of the actual moment when the person steps onto the foot-board is very clear and can be seen both in the Toplice and in the Arnoaldi situlae. In the latter case it is associated to the moment of victory of the race.

In accordance to classic sources in the Greek civilization there is evidence of habitual, real and conventional triumphal parades for the winners of the competitions, and it is normal in horse races that the winner to be awarded was the owner and not the charioteer (PATRUCCO, 1972: 385-386); considering the importance of horse breeding in the Veneti world and in the nearby areas, it is possible to imagine a parade with a nobleman standing on the foot-board of the chariot as being a real triumphal parade concluding the games in which the winner or probably the owner of the horses was officially awarded.

This theme is coherent with the interpretation of the situlae and with their collocation in tombs and completely justifies the use in the VI century of votive plates, where the chariot is symbolically represented to indicate the victory, testifying the reasons for fulfilling the vow.

The great interest in the analysis of the Rovereto plate, even though confined to the consistency of what has been conserved, is in the possibility

of thoroughly studying the ritual aspects of the Veneti aristocracy and to set the finding in the new knowledge data which have identified in the Lagarino district settlements (and in particular in the area of Nomi, TECCHIATI, 1996:123-150) and necropolis of the Middle Iron Age, proving also the existence of a sanctuary complex with votive deposits similar to the famous Mechel one. In the Middle Iron Age, the territory around Rovereto increasingly appears as an area of strong contacts

with the Veneti world and of mediation between them and the alpine area. Furthermore, the finding which was produced locally (or in a nearby centre of the Veneti centre), is useful in order to deepen the stylistic knowledge on the manifestations of Situlae Art in the alpine-Tyrol area, adding elements to arguments on the real provenance of the objects (and in particular for the Vace situla) not only regarding their production but also their stylistic elaboration.

SUMMARY - The picture of a man standing behind a charioteer on a ceremonial chariot and the logical link with the use of a votive plate suggest the identification of a moment of awarding of prizes of horse races in Iron Age Veneti rituals, with comparisons in Situlae Art and in Greek use, in which the owner of the winner horse makes his honour lap.

RIASSUNTO - La figura di un uomo in piedi accanto ad un avrigo su di un carro cerimoniale e il collegamento logico con l'uso votivo suggerisce, grazie anche a confronti nell'arte delle situle così come nell'uso greco, l'identificazione di un momento celebrativo relativo a corse di cavalli nell'ambito del rituale paleoveneto dell'Età del Ferro, nel quale il proprietario del cavallo vincente effettuava il giro di onore.

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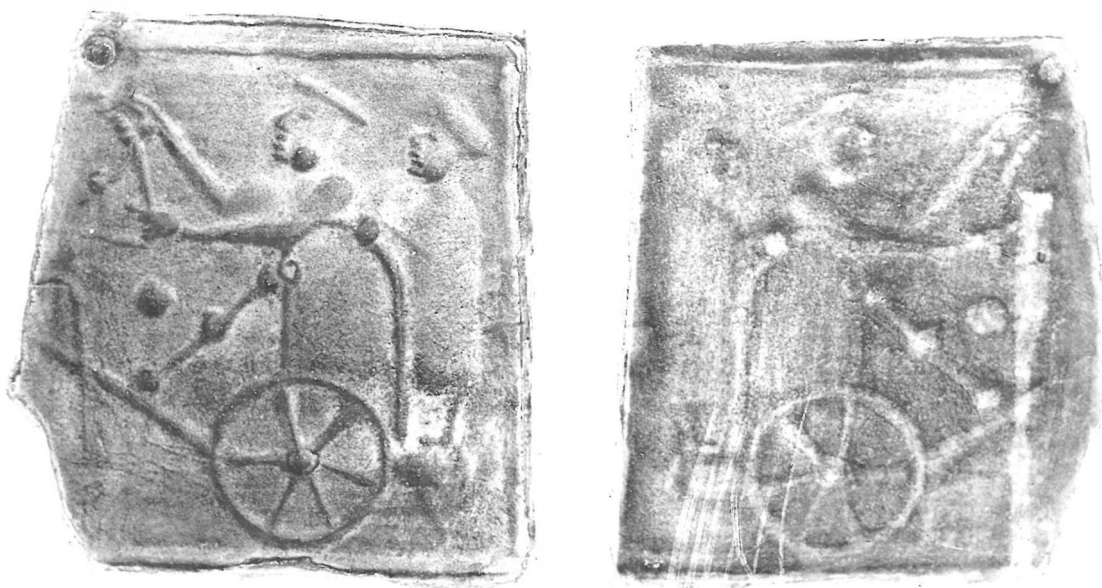


Fig. 1 - From left to right, verso et recto of the plate from Rovereto in the original 19th century photograph (Archivio Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte). Note the presence of the bronze nail used for hanging it, which is missing since the 1897 publication