The Boscoreale Cups:
What Level of Historical Specificity was Intended in the Tiberius Cup?

Richard Kendall – University of Birmingham

The interplay between historical reality and idealised allegory is rarely easy to demarcate in Roman art, even on large-scale monumental civic reliefs. The Boscoreale Cups are two silver skyphoi decorated in repoussé, 10cm in height with a diameter at the base of 9.5cm and at the rim of 12cm;[1] yet their study sheds light on the nuanced ways in which this dynamic could be represented, with implications that extend beyond the immediate context of this artefact's residential context. They were discovered, along with one hundred and nine other pieces of gold and silverware, in the cistern of the torcularium, or wine-pressing room, of the Villa Pisanella in Boscoreale.[2] Situated on the southern slopes of Vesuvius, Boscoreale was destroyed in the eruption of AD79, and, as four skeletons found in the torcularium and corridor of the house attest, this villa was not abandoned at the time of the disaster.[3] The discovery of a bed and dresser also in the torcularium imply that the function of this room was no longer wine-pressing by AD79,[4] with one hypothesis being that the individual found in this room was tasked with guarding the objects secreted in the cistern while the household family was away.[5]

The 'Tiberius' cup is one of two pieces found in the cistern which together are the only examples from the early imperial period of silverware illustrated, ostensibly, with historical scenes. A triumphal procession for Tiberius and a sacrifice are depicted on either side of the 'Tiberius' Cup, and an image of barbarian submission as Augustus is seen receiving the princes of a conquered people is seen on one side of the 'Augustus' Cup.[6] The only relief that does not immediately appear historical is the second scene of the 'Augustus' cup, an obviously ahistorical depiction of the Emperor, seated and holding a globe and *rotulus*, being handed a wreathed Victory by the goddess Venus and surrounded by both deities and personifications of Roman provinces. This scene is

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[1] Kuttner 1995, 207.
[2] Stefani 2010, 95.
[3] Stefani 2010, 94.
[4] Its initial identification being due to the presence of two large basins for pressing, the *lacus* beneath them, and the interred *dolia* jars in the room, in addition to a complex system of channels to drawn the must from the *lacus* to the jars.
[5] Stefani 2010 93.
[6] *Pignora*, on which see *RG* 4.3, 32.2; Josephus *AJ* 16.6.6; Dio Cass. 54.28.

commonly read as an allegorical illustration of Augustus' supreme power over the world.[7]

Conversely, interpretation of the other, more realistic scenes has been dominated by efforts to identify the event or events depicted, of which by far the most sustained and developed attempt remains that of A. L. Kuttner (1995), who analysed them as representative of Augustan succession policy. It is her argument, which has been followed by the vast majority of scholars since its publication,[8] that the depicted scenes relate to a specific historical event that is examined in this article. Focusing on the Tiberius Cup (see Figs. 1 and 2), the cup with the greater outward "documentary"[9] style, the evidence for and against the conclusion that either the triumphal or sacrificial scenes can be viewed as illustrations of actual incidents will be examined. Following this, both scenes will then be considered together to explore the extent to which a narrative sequence can be ascertained from the cup as whole. Contra Kuttner, whose assertion that the scenes of the cup mimic those of a rectangular public monument has been largely accepted without critique, this section will prioritise the physicality of the medium upon which the scenes have survived: the circular dimensions of a drinking vessel. Through this, it will be argued that the narratology of the cup can instead be best understood in relation to its use within the discursive and ostentatious context of a drinking banquet. Overall, this article seeks to demonstrate that while there is an element of historicity in the imagery, particularly that of the triumph (albeit referring to a different event than Kuttner argues for), the Tiberius cup was not designed in strict commemoration of a specific event, nor does it replicate a particular monument once erected at Rome or elsewhere. Rather, the imagery used maintains a conscious generality, reinforced through cyclical recurrence, which gives its moralistic message of piety a timeless applicability.

The Triumph Scene

The handles of the Tiberius Cup, which are decorated with vegetal motifs common during the Late Republic and Early Empire, demarcate the division between the two major scenes depicted: the triumphal procession and the sacrifice. The former of these (shown in Fig.1) is the more straightforward. The overall subject of the depiction is beyond doubt: this is clearly a triumphal procession for Tiberius. Tiberius is immediately

[7] Kleiner 1997, 378.
[8] Barden Dowling 2006, 147-8, Edmondson 2014, 148; Issac 2017, 62-4.
[9] Kuttner 1995, 4.

identifiable as the figure on the *quadriga* whose head nearly reaches the rim of the cup: the figure's "aquiline nose, thin compressed lips, round chin and long and muscular neck"[10] matching the characteristic features of Tiberius portraiture identified by typological studies.[11] He wears a toga, a *tunica palmata*, and he holds the eagle-tipped spectre and laurel branch which were symbolic of triumph. Most significantly, immediately behind Tiberius stands a figure holding a crown above the general's head. It can be inferred from the context that this crown is the *corona Etrusca*, the gold oak-leaf crown reserved for victorious commanders celebrating a triumph, which, due to its weight, was unable to be worn on the head, requiring a slave to hold it up.[12] In artistic depictions of triumph, the goddess Victory is commonly depicted performing this role:[13] the figure behind Tiberius on the chariot, however, appears to be a rare depiction of the actual *servus publicus*, supporting the interpretation of this scene as a depiction of an actual historical event.

The *quadriga* itself is decorated with a winged Victory and a non-winged female holding a laurel-branch in keeping with the triumphal celebrations. Surrounding the *quadriga* on foot are two groups of attendants divided by the figure of Tiberius: behind are four soldiers, two carrying laurel branches, dressed in the tunics and ankle-length boots which were standard Roman attire for such an occasion. The position and costume of these men behind their commander follows contemporary processional practice as related by historians such as Velleius (Vell. 2.121.3), who lived contemporaneous to the cup's production. In front of Tiberius are his *lictores*, who carry *fasces*, rods, over their shoulders. This part of the cup has been partly damaged, but the tunics and togas of these figures can still be seen through the legs of the horses that are pulling the *quadriga*. These horses, whose bodies are in high relief and whose heads have been lost, are being led by a second slave, who is shown straining forward with the reins in his right hand. This slave is turned back towards Tiberius, away from the direction of motion, and this creates a divide between the triumph scene and the procession of the bull as victim for sacrifice to the right of this slave; although, as both groups were present in the triumphal procession, this 'divide' is likely a compositional device to imply the existence of other figures who cannot be depicted in the small area of the relief. This self-contained scene depicts a massive bull, festooned with sacrificial ornaments, the most prominent being a triangular head plaque, *fastigium*, upon which an eagle motif can be seen. The bull is

[10] Kuttner 1995, 145.
[11] Pollini 2005, 57.
[12] Pliny NH 33.4.11.
[13] As on a Denarius of Sulla and L. Manlius Torquatus, 82BC; a Denarius of Octavian 18-17BC, Spanish mint; and famously on the later Arch of Titus; Kuttner 1995, 150-1, plate 104; 105 and 107. The latter example is particularly pertinent, as its Triumph scene, which features several allegorical figures, contrasts with the historical 'Sack of Jerusalem' relief in the opposite side of the arch.

attended by two figures, one of whom holds the bull by the neck while the other, at the bull's flank, carries an axe.

Classifying this scene as a depiction of a triumphal procession for Tiberius is uncontroversial: the major debate surrounding this scene, therefore, is the identification of which of the two triumphs Tiberius is known to have celebrated is illustrated on the cup. The first occurred on 1st January 7BC, following his campaign in Germany (a campaign he took over the charge of after the death of the original commander, Tiberius' brother Drusus). The second was in honour of his achievements in Pannonia, and took place on 23rd October AD12.[14] This latter triumph came eight years after the official adoption of Tiberius by Augustus which essentially established the former as sole heir to the emperorship.[15] The determining of which of these triumphs is depicted is fundamental to the interpretation of the meaning of the cup overall, as it provides an indication of the date of production and thus helps to situate the images in their historical context.

A large part of Kuttner's overarching conclusions regarding Augustan succession imagery, relies upon the identification of the triumph scene depicted as that of 7BC, arguing that the Boscoreale Cups represent the twin promotions of Drusus, whom she argues is present on the Augustus cup as the figure presenting the conquered princes to the Emperor, and Tiberius as imperial successors to Augustus. Consequentially, she dates the cup specifically to the year 8BC, this being the only year when such a situation existed.[16] Given that there are no obvious iconographical signifiers as to which triumph this may represent,[17] as the *spolia* of the campaign are not depicted on the cup (in this sense following real practice as such spoils would be presented at the start of the triumphal procession while the commander in *quadriga* came at the end), this date is reached through the interpretation of the overall composition and figuration of the triumphal scene. For example, Kuttner points to the presence of the *servus publicus* in place of Victory in the relief as conclusive evidence of this as the earlier triumph, arguing that, in contrast to the scene of Augustus surrounded by gods on the other cup, the state slave grounds Tiberius' achievements purely in the realm of the mortal. To pointedly present Tiberius' achievements with such realism reflects, she contends, a situation wherein, although heralded as a figure of considerable importance to Augustus and the Roman state (displayed through his compositional significance in the scene), Tiberius was still only a successful general, not yet officially adopted by Augustus and only a

[14] Suet. *Tib*. 20; Kienast 1990, 76-7;
[15] Ando 2000, 287-8.
[16] Drusus died in 9BC while on campaign in Germany. Kuttner 1995, 172-198.
[17] Hölscher 1994, 104-11.

member of the imperial family through marriage. Thus, he was not yet worthy enough to be depicted with divinities.[18] Consequentially, the triumphal scene has been taken to depict the specific occurrence of Tiberius' earlier triumph, which followed his campaign in Germany.

This conclusion, however, requires further thought when considered in the light of evidence both from the cup itself and of the wider conventions of Roman imperial art. Kuttner's dualistic approach to the triumph image, as a moderated depiction of Tiberius' success diametrically opposed to the apotheosis of Augustus, not only undermines the similarly of their predominant depictions on the two cups, but also exaggerates the significance of the figure she identifies as Drusus on the Augustus cup. Even if this is the individual depicted in this scene, which in the absence of a known typology for Drusus remains speculative, the presence of a barbarian in the foreground immediately in front of this supposed imperial heir undermines any attempts to label him as the preeminent general and successor, being in complete contrast to the unobscured and pronounced position Tiberius is afforded on his eponymous cup. With the exception of Augustus, no figure on any side of the two cups is presented as prominently as Tiberius, and this implies that the cups were designed at a time when it was known that only these two individuals held significant power in the Empire: implying a later production date and, consequentially, supporting the identification of the scene as depicting the later triumph in AD12 Tiberius took as sole heir.

Furthermore, the interpretation that the lack of accompanying divinities categorically establishes this as an earlier period when representations of Tiberius' achievements were moderated to reflect a lack of standing relative to Augustus, does not correlate with the known conventions of Roman imperial art. Comparison with the Grand Cameo of France (Fig. 3), another artefact likely to have been displayed in the private sphere, is illustrative. As in the triumph scene, Tiberius is surrounded only by human figures, while Augustus, in a higher register above Tiberius, is accompanied by divinities, similar to his presentation on the Augustus cup.[19] Pointedly, however, as Tiberius is depicted as the seated Emperor on the cameo, this piece almost certainly dates to the period of Tiberius' rule.[20] The suggestion, therefore, that Tiberius' depiction in the triumph scene is illustrative of a specific time under Augustus when Tiberius had not yet officially established his eminent position is mistaken: following the comparison of the two pieces, the iconographic programme of the Boscoreale Cups can be interpreted to support an

[18] Kuttner 1995, 150-1.
[19] Cf his depiction on the Gemma Augustea also.
[20] Kleiner 2018, 136-8.

identification of the later triumph, produced at the end of rule of Augustus or indeed, as with the cameo, under Tiberius himself.

Finally, it is important to recognise the detail that the designer of the cups intended in the triumphal scene and appreciate how this can be used to locate the scene temporally. As mentioned, the facial features characteristic of Tiberius portraiture are depicted to such precision that the figure is immediately recognisable; but it is the case the 'Tiberius-type' of portrait underwent a temporal evolution across the subject's lifetime.[21] While always depicted with an idealised youthfulness, the portrait face of Tiberius became more triangular, the chin more pointed and the hairstyle subtly different over time (see Figs. 4 and 5).[22] Although Tiberius is in profile in the triumph scene, his face noticeably corresponds better to these later types than the earlier depictions. This detailing further suggests a later date of production. Overall, the composition, iconography and stylisation of the cup strongly suggest a date of production late in the age of Augustus or in the early period of Tiberius: therefore, it is the triumph of AD12 that this scene most logically appears to depict.

The Sacrifice Scene

Similar to the Triumph scene, the sacrifice scene (Fig. 2) on the other side of the cup does not depict any mythological figures. At the left of the image a libation ritual is being performed by a damaged figure that nevertheless can be confidently identified as Tiberius from his equally prominent position in a scene on the reverse of his triumph. He is pouring wine into a focus surrounded by his *lictores*, who are depicted with the same *fasces* on their shoulders as in the reverse scene. At the extreme left one such *lictor* is turned away from the libation, facing the handle and implicitly the scene on the other side, but aside from this figure the focus of each personage is on Tiberius himself, emphasising his prominence in the composition in a way that is already shown by the high relief in which he is depicted. The scene to the right depicts the sacrificial killing of a bull and, although these scenes are more clearly divided than the processional and bull groups in the Triumph scene, it is probable that the reason for such a divide is the same: the small frame of the cup forcing the designer to compress the ritual into only its major events, which are thus to be understood as one overarching sacrificial scene. The Bull group is depicted in the moment immediately preceding the blow that will stun the

[21] Fittschen and Zanker 1985, 12.
[22] Pollini 2005, 57-9.

animal, with the axe-wielding figure poised about to strike and the bull being held down so that its neck is presented.[23] A crouching figure staring up at the axe holds the knife that will actually kill the bull, and another figure behind the animal is gripping the bull's flank to prevent escape. In the background of this scene is a tetrastyle temple (see Fig. 6) with a high podium and garland across the portico tied at each end of the architrave. An eagle atop a globe is depicted on the pediment of this temple, echoing the image seen on the *fastigium* of the bull on the other side of the cup.

The absence of mythological figures and factual nature of the subject-matter in this relief has led to a tendency to interpret this scene as an illustration of a specific event, a depiction of the historical performance of a ritual, as appears to be the case with the Triumph scene. In this reading, the identification of the temple is crucial.[24] This is because there were prohibitions on the wearing of such dress inside the walls of Rome;[25] given that the figures at the libation are shown in military attire with weaponry, if this temple is situated within the city, the scene must therefore depict a specific ritual which by common consent could contravene these rules. For Kuttner, the temple is that of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline, and the scene therefore a depiction of the *nuncupatio votorum* ritual performed before Tiberius left Rome for the campaign in Germany. In the *nuncupatio votorum*, the individual granted *imperator* status would begin in a toga and pay his respects at the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, consult the Senate and perform dedications at the Alban Mount before returning to the Temple of Jupiter and "cuirassed with his lictores to take up his command" (*Liv.* 21.63.7) leave the city. Although it is unclear at which point the *imperator* changed from toga to military uniform, Kuttner dismisses as absurd the idea that the march out of the city would be halted by a change of apparel and instead sees the *nuncupatio votorum* as "the only ceremony that could possibly account for the depiction of a group consisting of an armed imperator and *lictores paludati*"[26] sacrificing at the Capitoline, therefore placing this sacrificial scene temporally before the triumph depicted on the other side. Given that this ritual in dedication to Jupiter was performed at the outset of each campaign, discarding the relevance of the Germany campaign to the Tiberius cup does not nullify her argument. However, the problem with this interpretation lies in the identification of the temple as that of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. While Jupiter was the central deity of this temple, it was dedicated to the Capitoline Triad of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva and designed with a triple *cella*. Although an indication of this tripartite feature is not present

[23] Aldrete 2014, 47-8.
[24] Caprariis 2002, 719.
[25] Kleiner 1997, 379.
[26] Kuttner 1995, 141.

in every ancient depiction of this temple, often being substituted on numismatic depictions by an inscription, as on the coinage of Vitellius for instance;[27] the absence of any demonstrative attribute of the specific temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on this larger artefact, where greater detail may be expected, severely weakens this identification. Consequentially, this is unlikely to be a depiction of *nuncupatio votorum* ritual.

Conversely, Caprariis has identified the temple as the much older Temple of Jupiter Feretrius,[28] a building we know to have been architecturally far closer to the temple as shown on the cup, as it also lacked a triple *cella*.[29] As a result, he views the sacrifice instead as a rare instance of the taking of the *spolia opima*. This ceremony, which had its origins in the legendary past of Romulus, involved stripping the armour from the defeated enemy commander, attaching it to an oak trunk and then carrying this trophy into the city to be dedicated at the Temple of Jupiter Feretrius.[30] Although there are only three recorded instances of such a ceremony occurring,[31] all of which predate the period of Augustus by centuries, Caprariis posits that Augustus may have allowed Tiberius to undertake such a ceremony as part of his wider programme of reviving ancient rituals, and that this scene depicts the dedication ceremony.[32] This is in spite of the fact that the performance of such a ceremony is not testified to in any contemporary source material.[33] Cassius Dio even states that Augustus disallowed the appropriate performance of a *spolia opima* to Crassus early in his reign (Dio. 51.24).

Both of these interpretations have weaknesses, as does any understanding that attempts to read this scene as an illustration of a historical ritual performance. That Tiberius is depicted in military dress at a libation ritual, as any Roman viewer would have immediately recognised, casts doubt on the notion that this is an accurate rendering of an actual event. Sacrificants were always veiled and sacrifices never undertaken in military attire and the attempts by scholars to identify a ritual wherein such a rule could be disregarded are both mistaken and unnecessary.[34] The scene is pointedly not a documentary account of a specific sacrifice, but a composite image of sacrifice created

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[27] *RIC* 1 Vitellius 31, 56 and 127; Sobocinski 2013, 450-2.
[28] This being, by tradition, the first temple dedicated by Romulus (*Liv*. 1.10).
[29] Caprariis 2002, 723-9.
[30] Flower 2000, 34.
[31] Following Romulus' defeat of Acron, *Liv*. 1.10; Aulus Cornelius Cossus' victory over Lars Tolumnius, *Liv*. 4.19-20; and Marcus Claudius Marcellus, who killed Viridomarus, *Polyb*. 2.34.5-9.
[32] Caprariis 2002, 723-4.
[33] Although there are strong associations between the Temple of Jupiter Feretrius and the *spolia opima* in relation to the recapture of the Parthian Standards (19BC); Cornwell 2017, 130-2.
[34] Kleiner 1983, 289-93.

by the combination of programmatic compositional features and figures common in Roman imperial art. For example, the frequency with which the triangular composition of the figures surrounding the bull, labelled the 'Pausias motif', appears in Roman art is such that a Hellenistic painting prototype has been postulated for it.[35] Similarly, the enigmatic temple is not to be understood through reference to the specific architectural layout: rather, it is to be read as an iteration of the "temple-on-a-crag"[36] motif that can be identified in a range of Roman artwork from the early imperial period. A corresponding three-quarter view of a temple in the background of human action can be seen on the Aeneas panel of the Ara Pacis, the Villa Medici relief, and on coins down to the Claudian period. The use of these common compositional patterns only serves to highlight the eccentricity of Tiberius' depiction in military costume. Although this is clearly not intended as an accurate depiction of sacrifice, the reason for this particularly striking atypical representation is not immediately clear, as it appears to undermine the sense of generality created by the other imagery in the relief. It is only by interpreting the scenes in relation to each other that this can be understood.

Understanding the Scenes Together

The conclusions reached for each scene individually seem contradictory: while the Triumph scene can be identified as a particular historical event (Tiberius' triumph after his Pannonian campaign); the sacrificial scene does not relate to any particular performance or ritual and is to be understood thematically. If, as Kuttner proposes, these scenes were originally displayed as two sides of a four sided public monument,[37] this disparity may strike one as confusing; central to this reading is the assumption that the narrative style is homogenous across each image, creating a coherent collective artistic programme.[38] However, it is important to recognise the medium upon which these images are preserved, and to understand their relationship to each other as directly impacted by this form.[39] The Tiberius cup, in particular, benefits from such an approach as to be viewed in full it was necessary to handle the object.

The most obvious impact of the form of the Tiberius cup for viewing the image is that to see the images completely it is necessary to turn the cup. To an extent, this form of

[35] Kuttner 1995, 131.
[36] Kuttner 1995, 131-2.
[37] Kuttner 1995, 2.
[38] Galinsky 1997, 98-9.
[39] Huet 1996, 10.

viewing disrupts an attempt to read the triumph and sacrifice scenes as relatable temporally or thematically: as mentioned above, the handles split the two scenes, and the unity of each as singularly compressed representations of ritual events appears to negate the need for them to be reconciled to each other in order to be interpreted. Following Kleiner, the Tiberius cup might best be understood as two "separate scenes with a common protagonist, as everyone agrees is the case for the Augustus cup":[40] the difference in costume between Tiberius in each of the scenes supports such a reading. However, the recurrence of particular images on both sides, such as the axe used to stun the bull and the eagle seen both on the fastigium of the bull and on the temple pediment, seem to imply a connection between the two scenes. Furthermore, the episodic division of sub-scenes on both sides of the cup noted by Huet[41] (the figure of Tiberius in triumph and pouring a libation interposed by images of the bull) suggests that by turning the cup one was meant to understand both scenes in relation to each other. This form of viewing is dictated by the directionality of the images themselves: the triumphal procession wrapped across one side of the cup moves from left to right, and the initial figure on the other side of the cup turns toward the viewer who follows this direction of movement, implying that such a progression was expected. These factors have important implications for understanding both the narratology of the scenes and the reconciliation of the differences between the images on the two sides of the cup.

Firstly, the spatial movement of cup creates a "semiotic interplay"[42] as the sacrifice is followed by a procession which in turn leads back to the libation. Recognising this is central to understanding not only the unconventional depiction of the sacrificing Tiberius, but the artistic programme of the cup as a whole. This is because such a progression suggests a degree of causality between the two depicted events of sacrifice and triumph, which is corroborated by contemporary understandings of the role religious ritual played in orchestrating Roman military excursions. Military commanders would perform sacrificial rites, such as the aforementioned *nuncupatio votorum*, at the commencement of a campaign to ask for victory and, if successful, would then sacrifice at the end of a triumphal procession in recognition of the service of the god/s towards ensuring their achievement.[43] This cup thus presents a cyclical narrative formed of distinct events at the start and end of a military campaign, which overall serves to enforce the importance of a fundamental principle of correct Roman moral behaviour: *pietas*, duty to one's gods and fatherland, as here the proper observance of a sacrificial rite is

[40] Kleiner 1997, 379.
[41] Huet 1996, 27-8.
[42] Huet 1996, 27.
[43] Kleiner 1997, 379.

shown to directly lead to military success.[44] The triumph scene, moreover, emphasises the specificity of its depiction of imperial triumph so as to give a concrete example of the success of imperial piety. This has the effect of promoting Tiberius as a model for appropriate military behaviour, as he is shown not only performing the necessary sacrificial rites but also observing correct practice in his Triumph, as evidenced by the presence of the *servus publicus*. The presentation of this theme through a cyclical medium also serves to emphasise the eternal nature of this bond between the immortals and the pious. Therefore, examined through the context of their placement on a circular vessel, these seemingly opposing scenes can be understood as forming a coherent narrative extolling a central Roman virtue.

Lastly, the active form of viewing required by the cup presupposes the engagement of the viewer, and how these images might relate to the lived experience of their original audience. As noted by both Hölscher[45] and Kuttner, the triumph and sacrifices before and after the campaign were the only aspects of military conquest in the perceived experience of most citizens of Rome: “you see the imperial general sacrifice leave in procession…then one day you hear the war is over, "we won," and the imperial general comes…rolling home in procession, celebrating his triumph”.[46] Observing Tiberius in military costume, however, was less common. Aside from the brief period the general and his army would spend in the Campus Martius awaiting their official triumph, the populace at Rome would not have seen Tiberius dressed in armour, as weaponry and military dress were prohibited from being worn within the *pomerium* of Rome. Without positing a direct link, the juxtaposition of the overtly public triumph with a scene containing a cuirassed Tiberius, dressed as only those on campaign with him would regularly see, implies that the designer intended to create an illusion of intimacy between the owners and Tiberius: with the generic composition of the sacrifice scene purposefully used to offset the unorthodox depiction. This is supported by the medium upon which the reliefs are embossed: as a relief on a silverware cup, this image would only have been observed in a private context, and its archaeological find-spot in a villa complex attests to the wealth of the original owners of the cup. Following ancient literary accounts, the decoration of the cup predominantly served as a vehicle for the owner to demonstrate their expertise and grandeur (Petr. *Sat*. 52).[47] Therefore, the cup imparts both a general message extolling the virtue of piety, while simultaneously bringing prestige to its owner: each through the exhibition of the figure of Tiberius.

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[44] Hölscher 2008, 51.
[45] Hölscher 1994, 108-11.
[46] Kuttner 1995, 154.
[47] Beard 2007, 46.

Conclusion

The Boscoreale Cups represent the only surviving silverware objects before late antiquity decorated in scenes derived from historical events. The Tiberius cup, in particular, has no mythological elements on either of its sides, as opposed to the deities portrayed on one side of the Augustus cup. Aside from this, however, there is little correspondence in narrative style between the triumph and sacrifice scenes of the Tiberius cup. The former is a relatively accurate illustration of a triumph for Tiberius, which invites speculation as to the specific triumph it refers to: on the basis of the comparative evidence, a later date of AD12 has been shown to be more likely. The sacrificial scene, in contrast, is a standard depiction of a religious rite, which is drawn from common motifs and compositional arrangements. It is clear that there is a difference in the level of historical specificity intended by the designer for each of these images. Having established this, it was important to understand how such a disparity of styles was understood in practice, and this was achieved through the examination of the pieces as decorations on a circular cup. It has been shown that, read as a cyclical narrative, the differences in historical accuracy serve to emphasise the importance of piety, which is the overriding message of the cup as a whole. Moreover, historical reality has been shown to be purposefully discarded in the presentation of Tiberius in the sacrifice scene: his cuirassed performance of a libation ritual factually inaccurate but providing an impression of intimacy between the owner and Tiberius, thus enhancing the former's reputation. Therefore, it has been established that the designers of this cup intended to represent varying degrees of historical specificity in the images, and argued that this is most likely due to the fact that the purpose of these images was not to present history faithfully but rather use historical events known to its original audience to convey a moralistic message and increase the personal prestige of the cup's owners. It may be hoped that the arguments drawn here encourage scholars to consider more the physicality of the artefacts on which much of our evidence of Roman art has survived, be that similarly small-scale domestic products such as the Boscoreale Cups, or the imposing monumental reliefs that dominated the civic landscape.

Figures

Fig. 1. A flattened image of Triumph scene on the Tiberius cup, Louvre (From Kuttner 1995, Plate. 16).

Fig. 2. A flattened image of the Sacrifice scene on the Tiberius cup. Louvre (From Kuttner 1995, Plate. 15).

Fig. 3. The Grand Cameo of France. Augustus, as on the Augustus Cup, is in the presence of divinities, while Tiberius is pointedly among mortals. From the Emperorship of Tiberius in date, this cameo is of later production than the Boscoreale Cups, but thematically linked (From Kleiner 2018, 132, plate 9-1).

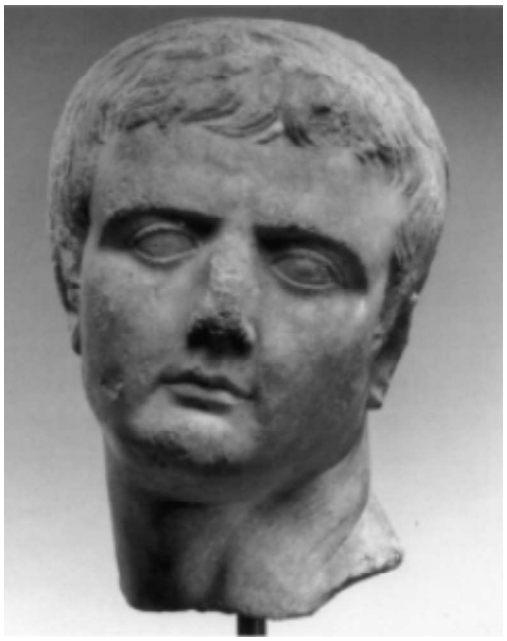

Fig. 4. Portrait head of Tiberius. Example of the Naples-Basel type Pollini identifies as dating from 19BC. Note the slightly rounded cheeks and tousled hair (From Pollini 2005, plate 8, no. 3).

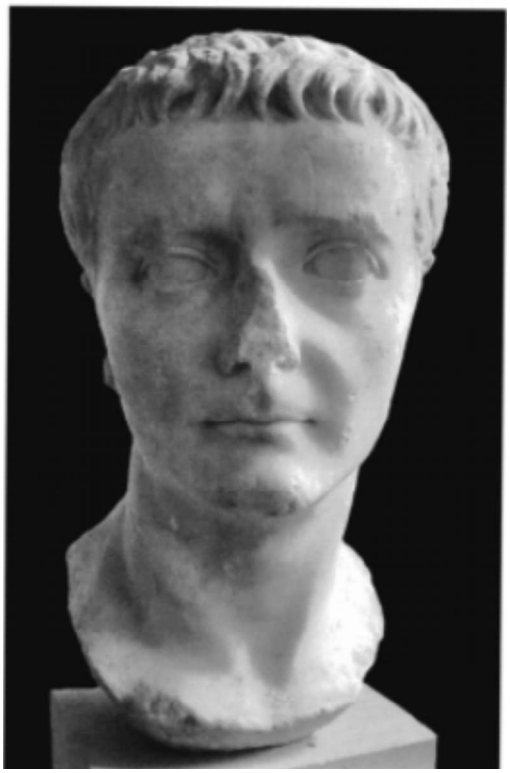

Fig. 5. Portrait head of Tiberius. Example of the Berlin-Naples-Sorrento type Pollini identifies as dating from AD4. In contrast to the earlier type, the head is more triangular and the locks of hair more regimented, while the chin has become more pointed (From Pollini 2005, plate 10, no. 1).

Fig. 6. A detail of the tetrastyle Temple in the Sacrifice scene, Louvre (From Kuttner 1995, Plate. 23).

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