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Book Review

Luigi Taborelli (2022), Stamped Medicine Flasks nei 'Virginia R. Grace Papers' e i progressi della ricerca, Roma: Edizioni Quasar, [2022]

Laurence Totelin¹

Abstract

Luigi Taborelli is the world expert on microcontainers produced in the Hellenistic period and stamped with the word 'lukion', referring to a medicinal preparation. In the book reviewed, Taborelli examines the archives of the famous American archaeologist Virginia Grace on the matter of these microcontainers. Examining archival material allows scholars to identify exemplars of these microcontainers which remain unexamined. As more examples of these microcontainers come to light, scholars will be able to better understand the trade in medicinal substances in the Hellenistic world.

Key Words: *pharmacological containers; Virginia Grace; archives; lukion; Hellenistic world*

Introduction

Since his first publication on the topic, Luigi Taborelli has contributed immensely to the study of ancient Greek stamped medicinal vessels (Luigi Taborelli and Silvia Maria Marengo (1998), *Il medicamento lukion e suoi contenitori, Archeologia Classica* 50, 213–272). In particular, he is the world expert on microcontainers stamped with the word 'lukion', referring to a medicinal preparation used, among other things, for the treatment of eye diseases. Some of these *lukion* vessels are additionally stamped with a personal name (perhaps that of a physician or pharmacologist, who prepared or administered the preparation) and/or a symbol, such as a rose flower, a tripod, or a lyre. These microcontainers, which were produced in the Hellenistic period, have been found in various locations in the Mediterranean, but mostly in Sicily, with major finds in Morgantina and Acragas.

In the present short volume, Taborelli examines the archives of the famous American archaeologist Virginia Grace (1901–1994) on the matter. Grace's first documented interest in stamped medicinal vessels dates to 1946, when she exchanged letters with Lucas Benachi on the matter. A few years later, in her

own words, she was 'fascinated' by the discovery of numerous *lukion* containers at Morgantina, and corresponded on the topic with the excavator of the site, Erik Sjöqvist, from 1958 onwards. Other well-known archaeologists featured in the volume are Kenam Erim, Lucy Talcott, and Homer Armstrong Thompson.

The volume is divided into 4 chapters. The first briefly describes the main source relating to stamped medicinal flasks in the Virginia Grace papers: Box 103, Folder 790. There are nineteen documents in total in the folder, dating from 1946 to 1982, plus six documents that are not dated. The second chapter is an edition of this archival material, including photos and facsimiles, when relevant. Each document is described, edited, and accompanied by a commentary in Italian. Chapter three deals with complementary material, that is, material that is relevant to the study of pharmaceutical containers in other parts of the Virginia Grace papers. The final chapter situates what we learn about medicinal containers from the Grace archive in a broader context. Taborelli here summarises his findings about the containers, their typology, the people who produced them, and the geographical areas where they worked. The volume has a useful index.

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Reading the archival material, despite Taborelli's insightful annotations, can occasionally prove to be challenging; however, there are benefits to be gained. I was particularly interested to see how Grace encouraged Sjöqvist to publish his findings, which he eventually did in 1960 ('Morgantina: Hellenistic Medicine Bottles, *American Journal of Archaeology* 64, 78–83). Sjöqvist's initial view was that he 'was quite sure nobody would care for it [sc. his discovery of medicinal micro-containers]' (letter to Grace, May 21, 1958,

edited on p. 39 of the present volume).

Taborelli's archival studies show that there are some examples of medicinal microcontainers that remain unexamined, some in private collections. In fact, it may be the case that many medicinal vessels have been so far ignored because of their unassuming size. As more examples come to light, historians of medicine will gain a better understanding of the trade in medicinal substances in the Hellenistic Mediterranean.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Luigi Taborelli (2022), Ενσφράγιστες ιατρικές φιάλες από τις «Σημειώσεις της Virginia R. Grace» και η πρόοδος της έρευνας

Laurence Totelin

Ο Luigi Taborelli είναι ο κορυφαίος ειδικός παγκοσμίως στα μικροδοχεία που παράγονταν κατά την ελληνιστική περίοδο και έφεραν σήμανση με τη λέξη «λύκιον», η οποία αναφέρεται σε ένα φαρμακευτικό σκεύασμα. Στο βιβλίο που σχολιάζεται, ο Ταμπορέλι εξετάζει τα αρχεία της διάσημης Αμερικανίδας αρχαιολόγου Virginia Grace σχετικά με το θέμα αυτών των μικροδοχείων. Η εξέταση του αρχειακού υλικού επιτρέπει στους μελετητές να εντοπίσουν παραδείγματα αυτών των μικροδοχείων που δεν έχουν ακόμα εξετασθεί. Καθώς θα έρχονται στο φως περισσότερα παραδείγματα, οι μελετητές θα είναι σε θέση να κατανοήσουν καλύτερα το εμπόριο φαρμακευτικών ουσιών στον ελληνιστικό κόσμο.

Λέξεις Κλειδιά: Φαρμακολογικά μικροδοχεία; Αρχεία της Virginia Grace; λύκιον; Ελληνιστικός κόσμος

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