

# Wine and water at the Roman *convivium*

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It is generally accepted that Roman drinking customs were derived with very little change from those of the Greeks. "Zwischen griechischer und römischer Sitte ist in Betreff der *Comissatio* kein wesentlicher Unterschied", wrote August Mau at the opening of his article *comissatio* in Pauly-Wissowa.<sup>1</sup> Similar judgements may be found in most of the standard handbooks on Roman life and customs; they draw in some respects a distinction between the meal proper, the *convivium*, and the drinking-party or *comissatio* which followed (a distinction which will be examined below), but the general assumption is that Roman and Greek customs were essentially the same, and that evidence from Greek sources can be applied freely to the Roman practice.<sup>2</sup> A recent article on the mixing of wine, concerned almost entirely with Greek sources and Greek practice, includes the phrase "Il va de soi que cette pratique grecque est également romaine, même si il y a sans doute plus de déviations chez les Romains".<sup>3</sup>

The assumption seems to me to be questionable; in many respects I believe Roman habits, both in dining and drinking, to have been profoundly different from those of the Greeks, even if a thick veneer of hellenization colours many of our literary sources. In this paper I propose to study one aspect: the evidence for the Roman practice of mixing their wine, and the vessels which were used for it.

## The *krater*

In the innumerable representations of the Greek symposium on Attic vases, the *krater* often plays a prominent part.<sup>4</sup> Its importance has been shown by recent critics; François Lissarague has repeatedly stressed the symbolic significance of representations of the *krater*, which imply the mixing of the wine with water according to fixed proportions, the equal distribution of the drink among the guests, and the whole complex of values that derive therefrom.<sup>5</sup> The same practices, and at least in part similar values, are then assumed to have been communicated to other cultures. Thus in Etruria and Latium the appearance

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1 RE IV.1 (1901) s.v. *comissatio* 610-19.

In this article I use the following abbreviations:

Blümner = H. Blümner, *Die römischen Privataltertümer* (Handbuch der klassischen Altertums-Wissenschaft IV.2 (2), 3rd ed., München 1911)

Le collezioni = *Le collezioni del Museo Nazionale di Napoli: I mosaici, le pitture, gli oggetti di uso quotidiano* (Roma 1986)

Hilgers = W. Hilgers, *Lateinische Gefäßnamen. Bezeichnungen, Funktion und Form römischer Gefäße nach den antiken Schriftquellen* (Beihefte der Bonner Jahrbücher 31, 1969)

Marquardt-Mau = J. Marquardt, *Das Privatleben der Römer* (4th ed., rev. A. Mau, Leipzig 1886)

Overbeck-Mau = J. Overbeck, *Pompeji in seinen Gebäuden, Alterthümern und Kunstwerken* (4th ed., rev. A. Mau, Leipzig 1884)

Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli = L. Pirzio Biroli Stefanelli (ed.), *Il bronzo dei Romani. Arredo e suppellettili* (Roma 1990).

2 E.g. Marquardt-Mau 331-37; Blümner 400-10; Daremberg-Saglio I.2 (1887) 1373-74, s.v. *comissatio*.

3 P. Villard, "Le mélange et ses problèmes," *REA* 90 (1988) 19-33, esp. 19 n.2.

4 Cf. H. Gericke, *Gefäßdarstellungen auf griechischen Vasen* (Berlin 1970) 36-42, 135-37.

5 F. Lissarague, *Un flot d'images: une esthétique du banquet grec* (Paris 1987) 9-12, 23-48; id., "Around the *krater*; an aspect of banquet imagery," in O. Murray (ed.), *Symptica. A symposium on the symposium* (Oxford 1990) 196-209, esp. 201; J.-L. Durand, F. Frontisi-Ducroux, F. Lissarague, "L'entre-deux-vins," in C. Bérard et al., *La cité des images: religion et société en Grèce antique* (Lausanne 1984) 117-26, esp. 124. Note especially Lissarague's point that the actual mixing and the water-containers are almost never represented on Greek vases; the selection shows what seemed to the vase-painter to be most significant.