The collection of antiquities of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, includes twelve Etruscan votive terracotta figurines from Cerveteri. Of these, only three are currently on exhibit. While of humble manufacture, this little group of objects is important partly because it belongs to a known find of considerable size from a specific site, and partly because it represents an interesting chapter in the history of collecting in general and of the Museum of Fine Arts in particular.¹

In December of 1885 a vast deposit of votive materials was discovered in Cerveteri on the Vignaccia property of Francesco Rosati.² (Fig. 1) The discovery was duly noted in Notizie degli Scavi by Luigi Borsari who described the find as consisting of a few thousand objects, mainly terracotta votives.³ Among the highlights of the find, Borsari lists the following: parts of the human body, a Fortuna or Juno Lucina type of kourotroph,⁴ large heads and busts wearing elaborate jewelry, and animals. He specified as out of the ordinary a type of Minerva, “of archaic style”, musicians, and a satyr type. He also noted a new type of object, a relief representing a sacrificial scene.⁵ Borsari described only one object in metal, a small lead Hercules. He postulated that the principal divinity of the site had been female with curative functions. A number of small architectural fragments were also discovered on the site, but no additional remains of a structure have come to light.⁶

The American Journal of Archaeology also noted the find in 1886.⁷ This notice essentially paraphrases Borsari’s longer description of the contents of the deposit. Subsequently objects from the find were dispersed to various collections in Europe, the USA and eventually New Zealand. The transactions that facilitated the dispersion of the material were mostly private and not necessarily illegal in the late 19th century. Tracing the whereabouts of the material from the Vignaccia deposit is a vast task in itself and will have to be the topic of another study. Briefly, objects from the find can be securely attributed to the following locations: The Vatican Museum, Cortona Museum, Siena Archaeological Museum, the museums of Hamburg and Berlin, the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of
Anthropology (formerly the Lowie Museum of Anthropology) in Berkeley, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Dunedin, New Zealand. Currently the Hearst Museum houses the largest portion of the 1885 find, some 800 pieces of the initial purchase that originally numbered around 1000. A number of objects were exchanged with the Dunedin Museum for native art.8

The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston9 describes a large collection of antiquities obtained by the Museum in 1888 through the agency of Rodolfo Lanciani, the renowned Italian archeologist, and author of numerous vol-

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**figure 1 – Cerveteri: location of the “Vignaccia.” After a sketch by Mario Del Chiaro. Source: Nagy 1988, fig. a.**
umes on Roman topography and archaeology, including the indispensable *Forma Urbis Romae*.\(^\text{10}\) (Fig. 2) The Trustees’ Report lists fourteen Roman portraits, eight Campana plaques, vases, bronzes, inscriptions and miscellaneous objects including the twelve terracottas that are the focus of this article. These pieces are carefully described in the *Report* with reference to the Borsari article of 1886.

In 1872 Lanciani became the first secretary of the Commissione Archeologica Comunale and then Chief Engineer at the Office of Excavations from 1877 to 1890 when he made the decision to devote himself exclusively to his duties as chair in Roman Topography at the University of Rome, a post he held until 1927. He died in 1929. Lanciani traveled to the United States in 1886–87 primarily for the purpose of delivering the Lowell lectures, but he made several additional stops on his circuit. His schedule must have been exhausting: during the first couple of months of his visit to the States, he delivered over 35 lectures.\(^\text{11}\) He presented his talks in English and formed special connections with museum curators, especially in Chicago and Boston.

It is partially the result of Lanciani’s extended visit to Boston that he agreed to help the Museum of Fine Arts and its curator of the newly established Department of Classical Antiquities, Edward Robinson (Fig. 3),\(^\text{12}\) and to obtain original antiquities to supplement the museum’s large collection of plaster casts. It is then that the museum, with the direct intervention of Lanciani and proceeds provided by the Everett Fund, purchased the pieces mentioned in the *Report* for the year 1888.

Obtaining material for export was not easy. In a letter dated January 6, 1888 to General Charles G. Loring, curator and
trustee of the MFA, Lanciani complains, “I have found the Roman market very poor, as far as antiquities are concerned. Partly because the financial crisis that has stopped private works, partly because the dealers have been frightened from buying since the Castellani-Borghi affair…” And on February 16, 1888, Lanciani again writes to Loring and mentions having sent four large marble busts and adds, “My next move will be to forward the terracottas from Caere. I am searching for a careful and trustworthy packer. It would be a great pity if anything should happen to those delicate little beauties.” Toward the end of this letter, Lanciani again bemoans the state of the antiquities market, “The experience I have gained these last months tells me that the only archaeological objects and works of classic art that can be found on the Roman and Italian markets are terracottas, busts and coins. Would you believe that since October (18)87, only four inscriptions have been put out for sale?...My hope is that the authorities of the Boston Museum will decide on a very limited number of ‘specialties’ in future acquisitions. Would you not like the idea to gather in the Museum the first collection of busts in Europe and America, Italy excluded? Or else the finest collection of terracottas? I believe it could be done in a short time. With kind remembrances to Robinson and Greenleaf, I remain dear General yours, Rodolfo Lanciani.”

And finally, in a letter dated February 27, 1888, to Loring, Lanciani describes and accounts for a considerable shipment, including, “A group of 12 specimens from the ripostiglio of terra-cottas discovered by the Canonico M. Lazzari of Caere (Cerveteri) in company with the town clerk. A description of the find has been given by Luigi Borsari...I have selected the specimens with the view that they should exhibit – in a small scale – all the characteristics of the great Cerveteri find. Gave 600 francs for them...” The receipt of the sale in the archives of the MFA names the dealer simply as Pennelli. In the same letter to Loring, Lanciani mentions a “wooden wedding casket with the Aldobrandini crest” that he had bought from Pietro Pennelli. One can safely assume that Pietro is the Pennelli named as the source of the terracottas.

The name Pennelli is linked in the third quarter of the 19th century with some shady dealings associated with the Campana and Castellani families. Among these “affaires” is the case of the Castellani sarcophagus acquired for a large sum by the British Museum in
1871 through Alessandro Castellani, the one-armed son of the House of Castellani, a dealer and collector of antiquities. Castellani had acquired the sarcophagus from Pietro Pennelli who claimed to have excavated it at Cerveteri. In 1862 the Louvre had acquired its famous, and genuine, Etruscan sarcophagus from the collection of Gianpietro Campana who had also employed Pennelli. The Brits wanted their own sarcophagus and Alessandro Castellani, with the aid of Pietro Pennelli, gave them one – even better – with an inscription that was soon determined to be a forgery based on the seventh-century inscribed gold fibula from Castelluccio di Pienza, in the Louvre. In 1875, Pietro’s brother, Enrico, publicly denounced the London sarcophagus as a fake that he had fabricated himself. Pietro vehemently denied the claim, threatened to sue his brother, who retracted his statement. The piece is definitely a forgery confirmed through chemical analysis that shows that the terracotta contains lead, a substance not found in Etruscan terracottas. It was removed from view in 1935, but current scholarly interest in forgeries, their makers and collectors has once again resurrected the Castellani sarcophagus. It is astonishing that someone in an important public office as Lanciani would deal with either of the Pennellis whose reputations must have been questioned, if not fully exposed, by 1888.

On May 30, 1888 Lanciani reiterated his earlier complaint to Loring that only busts and terracottas were available in Italy, especially Rome, for purchase by foreign museums. “Government and municipalities are extremely jealous of anything which may be suspected, right or wrong, to be of local interest: and strict orders have been given to the officers of the Export Bureau to stop the migration abroad of first rate works, or works of objects with local interest.”

It is therefore not surprising that by May 1889 Lanciani was in trouble with the Italian state for having sold antiquities to collections abroad. That same month, Baron Saverio Fava, legate of the Italian embassy in Washington D.C. informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome that a lucrative trade in art and archaeological material seemed to be going on between the USA and Italy with the agency of figures as important as Lanciani himself. The letter specifies objects (in fact provides a list) acquired by the MFA and names Lanciani as the provider and consultant. On June 28, 1889, Felice Barnabei, in a lengthy report to the Ministry of Public Instruction responds to and expands on the charges by

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**Figure 7 – Terracotta female head. Berkeley, Phoebe A. Museum of Anthropology, Inv. 8-2823. Courtesy Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.**
discussing in some detail the objects acquired specifically by the MFA. A law, approved in April 1878, specifically forbade trafficking in antiquities. As always, there seem to have existed loopholes that Lanciani hoped to invoke in his own defense. Barnabei, for one, does not appear to have had patience for this and asserted that Lanciani, “si crede fuori legge.” This is not the place to go over the lengthy and complicated procedures of the inquest that lasted well into 1890. As late as December 1890, Lanciani complains in a lengthy document sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that he had not been given the opportunity to defend himself against what he considered to have been questionable legalities of the accusations.

Some of Lanciani’s correspondence, preserved in the Lanciani archives located in the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, refers, if at times obliquely, to this inquest. The first letter (134.15), written by Edward Robinson on December 26, 1889, is addressed to Lanciani’s wife: “I am extremely sorry to learn that we have been, however unconsciously, the cause of any trouble or annoyance to Signor Lanciani, as it seems a poor return for the many favors he has done us…..I was afraid some feeling of the kind might arise – as we are not strangers to political jealousies in America! – and it was for that reason that I was very particular to inquire of Signor Lanciani whether he wanted to have his name appear in connection with the antiquities we had secured through his kindness…” The tone of the correspondence is apologetic. It seems that much of the trouble started with the ‘Trustees’ Report’ of early 1889 that provided Lanciani’s name as the source of the purchases.

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**Figure 8** – Female bust, terracotta, inv. 8360. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Everett Fund. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

**Figure 9** – Terracotta female bust. Berkeley, Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, Inv. 8-2839. Courtesy Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley.

A later letter (134.13), dated May 26, 1890 from Robinson to Lanciani reads like the plot of a mystery, and is difficult to interpret without having access to Lanciani’s side of the correspondence, “…You ask my advice regarding the other matter, and first let me thank you for the proof of your confidence…. I shall certainly keep the matter perfectly quiet for the present. A bomb fired into empty air hurts nobody, and once fired its force is gone…..And knowing the man’s feeling for us, it is an excellent thing to have a weapon like yours laid away, ready for use.” A handwritten copy of a letter sent by W. P. Garrison to Robinson on June 19, 1890 (134.14) is far more formal in tone and speaks of the material being “illegally in Boston.” By this time Lanciani had been suspended from his official duties. Clearly Garrison is defending the position of the purchasing institution: “The Department of Antiquities in the Ministry of Public Instruction of the Italian government has just instituted a commission to look into the circumstances of the acquisition, by the Boston Museum, of certain antiquities coming from excavations in the city of Rome, and it is said that the finding is that the same are illegally in the possession of the Museum. The Ministry is informed that the purchases were made by Prof. Lanciani, who being a government employé, is precluded by law from bringing or selling any objects of antiquity, and it is moreover ascertained that the exportation was effected fraudulently and without the previous examination and permission of the proper authorities… He has been suspended from the archaeological commission…[later]...the purchase made in good faith by a foreigner, of any work of art which has left the Kingdom, cannot be called into question, the right of the Boston Museum to the works so purchased is not impeached…”

On the next day Robinson’s reply to Garrison asks for absolute secrecy and proceeds to blame General Luigi Palma di Cesnola, the first director of the Metropolitan Museum for much of the wrongdoing. “…The information contained in your enclosure comes directly or indirectly from Gen. di Cesnola, who is at the bottom of whatever trouble there has been. His
ill-feeling towards this museum has been displayed in various petty ways less flattering to himself than to us...Sig. L[anciani] has always been a warm friend to this museum...On his return to Italy he very kindly selected and purchased for us, of various dealers in Rome, a considerable number of small antiquities, busts, terra-cottas and the like, which although interesting and important on this side of the ocean, were held at small value in Rome. On these we paid export duties. However, exaggerated and misleading descriptions of our antiquities were forwarded to the Italian Minister for Public Instruction, through Gen. Di Cesnola’s instrumentality.” (134.12)

The last letter (134.16) dated July 18, 1890, and sent to Lanciani, is signed by Martin Brimmer, President of the Trustees of the MFA and Edward Robinson. It is an official document in defense of Lanciani’s role in the MFA purchases. It closes with the following lines: “It is inconceivable to us that the friendly advice you have given us as to the few objects we have bought should have been made even the pretext for any charges against you.”

As this correspondence indicates, the situation regarding the purchase and exportation of the objects, specifically the Etruscan terracottas, now in the collection of the MFA, was far from clear. This exchange of letters, and I wish I had the missing replies from Lanciani himself, suggests that the Italian government was hardly sympathetic to the trade in its patrimony. And yet, such trade existed on a large scale despite existing laws.

A decade after the Lanciani-Robinson exchange, Alfred Emerson, acting on behalf of Phoebe Apperson Hearst, was busy purchasing the bulk of the Cerveteri terracottas from the Vignaccia and shipping figure 13 – Statuette of standing Athena, terracotta. Inv. 88-362. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Everett Fund. Photograph® Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
them to Berkeley, California. Mariano Lazzari, the priest mentioned in Lanciani’s note to the MFA regarding the purchase of the Boston terracottas, is the person named on the bill of sale, dated May 12, 1902. That Emerson, a talented and internationally renowned archaeologist, professor and museum curator at the Art Institute of Chicago, should have been involved in procuring antiquities for the wealthy Mrs. Hearst was certainly less odd in 1902 than it would be today. In an obituary of Emerson, published in the American Journal of Archaeology, 1944, Harold North Fowler wrote, “He was a remarkable linguist, speaking seven languages fluently, and his knowledge of the monuments of antiquity, and the facts of history was exception-
al. He was a gentle, absent-minded scholar, without too much common sense. He possessed a good sense of humor...” All of these qualities come through in what remains of his correspondence with Mrs. Hearst in the small strong box of Accession 50 at the Hearst Museum in Berkeley.

The approximately 800 pieces from the Vignaccia deposit currently in the storeroom of the Hearst Museum include vast categories of large heads, busts, figurines in groups and alone, animals, anatomical votives and some fruits and miniature altars. Lanciani's selection of the twelve pieces for the MFA shows that he made it carefully and with an understanding of the peculiarly distinctive characteristics of the deposit.

I have selected eight pieces from the MFA to highlight: three heads of busts, four figurines and one relief. I have omitted the other four pieces because they belong to more generic categories that occur in numerous votive deposits.

All three heads occur in the Hearst collection in at least one example. MFA 88.358 (Fig. 4) is the earliest type, a fully rounded reduced bust, 29.4 cm. high, with a torque necklace from which hangs a crescent shaped pendant on either side. The back of the head and earrings exhibit signs of having been “helped” in the recent past. Berkeley 8-2821 (fig. 5) has a face and dimensions nearly identical to MFA 88.358, but with a more reduced bust and a flange surrounding the head. The Berkeley bust has no necklace, but sports large “a grappolo” earrings. The addition and removal of jewelry and other details is not unusual among identical terracottas from the Vignaccia. No doubt the variation of such “accessories” provided variety to the offerings of the terracotta workshop that supplied the Vignaccia sanctuary.

MFA 88-359 (fig. 6) is a simpler and smaller version (20.3 cm. high) of 88.358. The facial features are very similar, but the treatment of the hair in tight curls on the sides with a diagonal flange divided in the center of the forehead, suggest that the original mold, while related to the larger head, had been produced separately. Berkeley 8-2826 is a nearly identical counterpart to the piece in the MFA. Other examples in Berkeley (8-2824 and 2823) exemplify variations (the elaborate headdress and large earrings) and different generations of the type, with 8-2823 (fig. 7) at 29.3 cm. representing the first generation.

An elaborate bust (MFA 88.360, 25.8 cm. high) is a type most particular to the
Vignaccia (fig. 8) where it occurs in a number of variations. Berkeley 8-2839 (fig. 9) is the closest parallel to the MFA piece. This elaborate bust type is associated with Cerveteri and is absent from other sites. The examples from the Vignaccia are characterized by the extended bust that includes the shoulders, the wide flange that surrounds the entire bust, and the elaborate jewelry that closely replicates actual Etruscan jewels. Berkeley 8-7610 is a fragment that shows in detail the ornaments of the necklace, including a reclining figure, suggesting gold repoussé. This type also occurs in a number of variations. The facial features of the busts in the MFA are common to Etruria and Southern Italy, but the three that Lanciani selected are the ones most particular to the Vignaccia.

One of the most characteristic types from the Vignaccia deposit is represented by MFA no. 88.361, an oddly stylized Menerva (fig. 10), with large head, outlined features and a grumpy expression. It occurs in an array of variations at the Vignaccia and nowhere else to my knowledge. The closest parallel to the MFA piece is Berkeley no. 8-2463 (fig. 11), a slightly smaller version of the former. Variations include a type with a round shield, and two peculiar seated types, one with owls on her shoulders, no. 8-2431, (Fig. 12) the other seated on a kline her feet resting on a wide footstool. This figure type also occurs in a male warrior counterpart at the Vignaccia that is not represented at the MFA. MFA no. 88.362 (Fig. 13) is a more standard Hellenistic type of Athena, except for the oversized helmet. It has no counterpart in Berkeley.

The relief plaque, MFA 88.364 (fig. 14), currently on exhibit, represents a scene of sacrifice that Borsari describes as a completely new type, “pure votiva.” Under a tree laden with large round fruit is a rectangular altar on which burns a flame. On the right stands a female figure (that Borsari mistakenly calls a priest) with a patera in her right hand. A small horned quadruped (goat or deer) emerges toward the altar behind this figure. On the left

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*Figure 17 – Statuette of a standing woman, terracotta. Inv. 88-356. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Everett Fund. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*
stands a figure that plays a double tibia. The composition is enclosed in an architectural setting which is more fully preserved on a fragment of the same scene in Berkeley, 8-2650\(^{18}\) (fig. 15) The style of the figures is closely related to the Menerva type (MFA 88-361, Fig. 10) and the musician as well as a lyre bearing counterpart, occur at the Vignaccia singly and in pairs as separate figures.\(^{49}\) Earlier I have identified the scene depicted on the plaque as a sacrifice to and by Artemis/Artumes, one of the principal divinities at the Vignaccia.\(^{50}\)

MFA 88-355 and 88-356 (Figs. 16-17) are well-preserved examples of Hellenistic – Tanagra types, not distinctive to the site necessarily, but representative of a large number of the pieces from the sanctuary.\(^{51}\)

While few in number, the terracottas in the Boston MFA from the Vignaccia deposit represent remarkably well the most characteristic as well as the most common examples from the sanctuary. Lanciani selected his pieces for Boston very well. In each case he procured the best preserved example. As he expressed it in a letter to Loring of May 30, 1888, his intention was, “In selecting the terracottas I was guided by the thought that the Boston Museum means to become one of the most complete, rich and representative in this department: and I have sometimes taken into consideration not the beauty but the scientific importance of the objects and their indispensability in a museum of the first class.”\(^{52}\)

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NOTES

1. I would like to thank the following institutions and scholars for their help with access to the material, archival and physical: The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, curators Christine Kondoleon, John Herrmann, and especially Mary Comstock who finally tracked down the original Lanciani letters to General Loring, and The Lanciani archives of the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte, located in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome and its gracious librarian, Francesca Zannoni, who gave me access to the letters from the MFA to Lanciani.


3. Borsari 1886, 38-9. “…nel fondo denominato Vignaccia…, sull’estremo lembo occidentale della lunga lacinia di tufo sulla quale sorgeva l’antica Caere…Gli oggetti raccolti, che sommano a parecchia migliaia, furono scoperti a m. 1.5 circa di profondità sotto il piano di campagna, sparsi e misti alla terra vegetale.”

4. See Nagy 1988, type IID 8, and related types IID.

5. Borsari 1886, 38, “Del tutto nuovo…è una terracotta pure votive, alta m. 0,15, nella quale è rappresentata a bassorilievo una scena di sacrificio. Sotto un albero carico di grossa frutta, è posta un’ara quadrata su cui arde il fuoco. Alla destra di chi guarda è il
sacerdote velato, con patera nella destra mano, in atto di sacrificare; alla sinistra è l’aule-ta suonante doppia tibia.” This description obviously corresponds to MFA # 88.364, (fig. 14) on which see below.

6. For a full list of extant architectural fragments in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum, see: Nagy 1988, 1, n.5.
7. AJA 2, 218
8. or a list see: Nagy 1988, 2.
9. Year ending Dec. 31, 1888, 9-10
11. For the itinerary, see Palombi 2006, 120-23.
13. This letter and the others from Lanciani to the staff of the MFA were kindly made available to me through the agency of Mary Comstock of the Department of Classical Antiquities, whom I thank for her energetic search for the archival material.
14. Archive of the MFA, Department of Classical Antiquities.
15. Francesco Rosati, mentioned in the NSc as the person on whose property the find had been made. (See n. 3.)
16. Archive of the MFA, Department of Classical Antiquities.
23. Borelli 1993, 433-34; A. Andrén, Deeds and Misdeeds in Classical Art and Antiquities (Partille 1986) 67-68; Bailey (above, n. 18) 30-31; Williams (above, n. 17) 620-21. Perhaps the reason for this was summed up by Reinach in 1886: “C’est un chef d’oeuvre, mais dont les auteurs vivent encore,” in a review in Revue critique d’histoire et de culture 21 (1886) I, 484. (Quoted by Williams (above, n. 17) 621.
24. Letter in archives of the Department of Antiquities, MFA, Boston.. 
prie raccolte antiquarie, è stato dimostrato anche recentemente…”
30. See note 25.
32. The letters are kept in the Biblioteca dell’Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Storia
dell’Arte, Mss. Lanciani, files 133-34. These were made available to me through the gen-
erous help of Francesca Zannoni.
33. The correspondence regarding the purchase is preserved in the vault of the Phoebe A.
Hearst Museum of Anthropology, under accession 50.
34. This document is now kept in the vault of the Phoebe A Hearst Museum of
Anthropology in Berkeley, under accession 50.
35. H. N. Fowler, obituary of Alfred Emerson, AJA 48 (1944) 80.
36. For a complete list, see Nagy 1988.
41. Nagy 1988, 70, no. IIA16e.
43. 8-2463: Nagy 1988, 135, no. IIA4, round shield: 136, no. IIA4b, fig. 78.
44. Nagy 1988, 194, no. IIB16, fig. 170, acc. No. 8-2431.
45. 8-2561: Nagy 1988, 196, no. IIB16, fig.172.
47. It is 21.5 cm. high, but Borsari (1886, 38) describes it in his report as being approxi-
mately 15 cm. Since the description is exact, it seems that he was not carrying a meas-
uring tape.
48. 8-2650: Nagy 1988, 239, no. IIG12, fig. 250.
49. 8-2576 (fig. with lyre): Nagy 1988, 212, no. IIE1, fig. 196; 8-2449: 214, no. IIE4, fig. 199;
19. See also Nagy, 2005, 158, pl. IIa.
50. Nagy 1989-90, 733-34.
51. 88.355: 19.4 cm. high; 88.362: 21.5 cm. high. Both have parallels in Berkeley, but less well
preserved: 8-2458 and 2627: Nagy 1988, 193, no. IIB13b, fig. 167 and 170, no. IIA39, fig.
130, respectively.
52. Archive of the MFA, Department of Classical Antiquities.
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