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## Wine, Dance and Pugilism for another Status: some comments on the OSRG Amphora HA20

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## OSRG COLLECTION

*Wine, Dance and Pugilism for another Status: some  
comments on the OSRG Amphora HA20,  
by Audrey Gony*

I had the chance to come to Harrow School last March 2014, as a visiting student from Oxford University, to study in the Old Speech Room Gallery some objects which are published in the internationally recognised *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*. Great Britain, Harrow School by Jasper Gaunt, Thomas Mannack and Robert Wilkins. I was especially interested in the amphora HA 20, in order to complete my PhD thesis on Etruscan dance. I'm affiliated to the Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris, France, and to the Ca' Foscari University in Venice, Italy, and the Old Speech Room Gallery appeared to me to be an outstanding museum for public and student visits, and an amazing place of research for international scholars.

The amphora HA 20, with a height of 34.4 cm, was originally used to conserve and transport neat wine. It was acquired by Harrow School around 1952 from a private collection. It is dated from the 5th century BC, and is believed to be of Etruscan origin. Unfortunately the precise provenance is not known, since the vase was not discovered under modern scientific conditions, but we suggest a funerary context. However, the amphora is particularly relevant for the ancient practices and religious beliefs it shows to us.

It is decorated on its two faces by two male figures who are depicted face to face. On one face, the figures are dancing. An inscription has been added to the representation but we still don't really know what it means (a name? a mark of

possession?). On the other side, two figures are gesticulating in a different way: the hands are clenched as fists. During my visit I discovered that in a specific position, light shining on the vase permits us to distinguish elements of the decoration that are not normally visible, including a bandage around the men's heads, which was used to maintain the hair, and some crossed bandages on the fists. The lines on the hands refer to a specific bandage used to hold small bronze blades on the fingers. This device was used by boxers (known as pugilists) to more violently hurt their opponents. This game is sometimes seen a precursor of the Roman gladiators. Also, a little belt appears around the waist; it was used to tightly hold the penis for a better range of motion; the sports were practised naked.

The representation of ritual performances such as dance and pugilism on an amphora buried in a tomb is very relevant. In the ancient world wine was not drunk neat. Its effects were considered too dangerous and were known to send people into another state of consciousness. Thus, it had to be mixed with



water and other ingredients like cheese and spices in order to keep control. Representations of pugilists usually appear at the same period on tomb entrances in Tarquinia. They mark the limit between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and seem to have the symbolic role of representing the passage between two states and two worlds, and protecting the tomb. Thus, the presence of pugilists on an amphora seems to mark a symbolic idea of passage and transformation of state that neat wine also has in rituals and religious beliefs. The presence of dancers on the other face is also significant. Dance in funerary representations and in ritual practices has the same intermediary role and the same idea of transformation of state and passage. Thus, burying this object in a tomb was part of a ritual, symbolic, funerary and propitiatory practice: to help the deceased to change world and state.