

Satyric Divination  
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Although a complex and multi-faceted element of life in the ancient world, the art of divination was rarely depicted in Greek vase painting in the diverse spectrum that both ancient sources and modern scholars attest existed in antiquity. When scenes of non-ecstatic divinatory practices are identified, they often depict the formulaic representation of hepatoscopy. Similarly, prophetic priestesses are often depicted not in the moment of enthused ecstasy, but rather in scenes inspired by tragic authors. However, one scene on a South Italian bell-krater attributed to The Dolon Painter in The Princeton Art Museum provides a refreshing contrast to the overall lack of visual evidence for these popular practices. In this curious image, two satyrs, identified on account of their brutish faces, are depicted in what has been interpreted by A.D. Trendall as a scene of “fortune-telling or divination [that could] well be some sort of satyric version of a consultation.” It is my goal in this paper to situate the scene in its iconographical context, illustrating some of the artistic conventions to which the image adheres as well as closely comparing one possible source of visual inspiration upon which The Dolon Painter may have drawn. Following this artistic analysis, I will attempt to place the image in its proper historical framework, defining the specific mythological perspective to which the artist may have been alluding in his work as well as exploring the literary and archaeological evidence for the systems of divination that may be referenced in the scene.