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MEMORIE DEL VASO BLU

Photograph by Luigi Spina

Texts by Valeria Sampaolo

The Blue Vase is a "small" masterpiece to be found among the many treasures in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples.

It was discovered in 1837 in Pompeii, in a niche of a small chamber tomb overlooking the Villa of the Mosaic Columns. It is decorated with just two colours: the dark cobalt blue of the ground, over which a layer of white glass is engraved – in the same manner that a cameo is created in layers of agate or shell – to create a design of vine branches beneath which children pick bunches of grapes.

The movements and postures of the children are those normal for the harvesting of grapes, an important moment in the agricultural year that was illustrated on many occasions by ancient craftsmen on ceramics, mosaics and marble and in frescoes. But, whereas in most of the representations of the grape harvest the impression is given of the workers' fatigue, in the Blue Vase the young pickers are enjoying themselves, cheerfully playing musical instruments and apparently moving with light dance steps.

In addition, there are masks set on acanthus leaves, and images of branches of oak, garlands of ivy, birds, ears of wheat, poppy pods, quinces, laurel branches, pomegranates and other summer and autumn fruits, all mixed together and contrasted to suggest the generosity and fertility of nature. The choice of plants was carefully made as each has a religious or symbolic meaning. Many allude to Dionysus but other references in the decoration imply the continuation of life and rebirth after death.

You are invited to discover these messages in the beautiful photographs by Luigi Spina and the descriptive text by Valeria Sampaolo.

Luigi Spina, photographer: Subjects of his work are amphitheatres and the civic sense of the sacred, the links between art and faith, ancient cultural identities, the physicality of classical sculpture, the many aspects of the sea, and the contents of the drawers of the archaeologist-dreamer Giorgio Buchner. He has published *L'Ora Incerta* (2014), *The Buchner Boxes* (2014) and, most recently, *Le Danzatrici della Villa dei Papiri*, published by 5 Continents Editions in its Tailormade series.

Valeria Sampaolo is Head Curator of the collections in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples and the author of numerous articles and books. Her primary interest is the early excavations carried out in the area around Mount Vesuvius and the reconstruction of the settings illustrated in the frescoes in the museum, of which she has curated the new exhibition.