

# Truth in Roman Labeling?

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Painted labels (dipinti) were marked on Roman export amphoras to denote the producer of the contents, dates, and other matters. An amphora's shape indicated its original contents. Recent research suggests that only reused jars generally bore dipinti specifying the contents. While amphora dipinti have too often been obliterated by time, at Pompeii hundreds have been discovered. The fourth volume of *CIL* and its supplements are a treasure of such Pompeian dipinti, and some graffiti. But researchers must be cautious in drawing conclusions about the contents of amphoras from these dipinti. To cite two examples, Koan-shaped jars known from stamps and clay to have originated in Pompeii, and to have contained imitation Koan wine shipped from Pompeii to markets as far away as India, do occasionally bear at Pompeii the painted words COVM VET ("old Koan"), but much more frequently we find on them dipinti naming, for example, raisin wine, honey wine, grape juice, and even chick peas. Doubtless these jars were seconds, rejected for export, but reused for storage. In another example, dipinti on imported Spanish garum amphoras at Pompeii often refer to *lympa*, a Latin word meaning "water," but in this case possibly referring to heavily diluted wine of the kind regularly used at banquets. (We must assume that these reused jars were thickly pitched, to cover the garum odor.) Dipinti naming contents, then generally tell us what the Romans stored in their amphoras after the original, imported contents had been used.

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