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CHOICE OF SUBJECT ON LATE ETRUSCAN FUNERARY URNS

At first glance the scenes on late Etruscan funerary urns from Chiusi, Volterra, and Perugia seem to be a heterogeneous lot, but they actually fall into three, sometimes overlapping, categories: decorative motifs, daily life, and stories from Etruscan history and Greek mythology.

The first group, the decorative, comprises urns with friezes whose prime intent is ornamental. Floral patterns belong here, as do "decorative monsters"—those creatures whose ability to frighten has been subordinated to the overall design¹. Consider two Griffins heraldically flanking a volute-krater². Unlike scenes with a Griffin fighting Arimasps³, such friezes have no narrative content. All the elements can be changed; only the pattern matters. For example, dolphins may replace the Griffins with a rosette substituted for the vase⁴. Winged youths holding a vase or a winged demon holding two flanking Griffins likewise belong to this class⁵. Anyone of the individual motifs can be enlarged to fill the entire cask without negating the decorative function. On a Chiusine urn the two rosettes and a peltast in the field indicate the ornamental nature of the benign woman-faced lion-monster⁶. Also belonging to this group are urns with masks and single gorgoneia⁷.

The second class consists of scenes from daily life, that is of activities carried on by the contemporary Etruscan. A shepherd with his flock, a lesson in school, and a sacrifice are examples given by Körte⁸. A narrative element has entered, although

(1) BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* III pl. 152 N^{os} 1-5 (Volterra 538; Volterra-Manetti; Volterra 28, 25, and 14 respectively). Please note that for the sake of brevity only one or two examples of each type are cited, and references are given only to BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* or *CUE*.

Prof. Peter von Blanckenhagen used the engaging description, "decorative monsters", in a lecture, "Easy Monsters", at the Morgan Library, New York City on April 5, 1983. His lecture will be published with the rest of the symposium *Monster and Demons: Death and Life in the Ancient and Early Medieval World* in honor of Prof. Edith Porada, April 5-7, 1983.

(2) BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* III pl. 146 N^{os} 1-2 (Florence 639 and 642).

(3) *Ibid.* pl. 37 N^{os} 1-2 (Volterra 352 and 416).

(4) *Ibid.* pl. 154 N^o 12 (Volterra 31).

(5) *Ibid.* pl. 155 N^o 3 (Florence 640) vase; pl. 43 N^o 3 (Volterra 490) winged demon.

(6) *Ibid.* pl. 150 N^o 15 (Palermo 103).

(7) *Ibid.* pl. 142 N^o 1 (Volterra 43) for the masks; pl. 140 N^o 6 (Perugia 356) for the gorgoneion.

(8) *Ibid.* p. 196-198; pl. 131 N^o 1 (Volterra 591) shepherd; 132 N^o 1 (Volterra 131) school lesson; 132 N^o 2 (Volterra 212) sacrifice.

specific names cannot usually be given to the individual figures. For instance, the absence of Atalanta, crucial for identification, separates the everyday boar-hunt from the Calydonian⁹. Similarly a large number of urns depict battle scenes involving unspecified combatants¹⁰. Funerary processions of dignitaries, often cited as models for Roman triumphs, also belong here¹¹. The presence of the wife and children of the head "licitor" on a Volterranean urn in its mixture of the public and private anticipates the processions on the Ara Pacis¹². This emphasis on family relationships occurs most often on urns with funerary themes—be they the several types used for leave-taking or for the journey of the deceased to the Underworld¹³. Characteristic is a Volterranean urn which portrays the poignancy of the separation between husband and wife¹⁴. As they firmly clasp right hands in a kind of *dextrarum iunctio*, members of their family stand around them waiting while two horses, one on either end, are held ready for the journey. Significant and separating these scenes from the third category, the mythological, is the contemporary Etrusco-Roman dress of the participants. While Greek figures may not always wear "pure" Greek garb on the urns, neither do they wear togas.

Frequently a demon, generally a winged female with a torch, is added to the family group¹⁵. The presence of such figures does not put these friezes into the mythological realm. They belong instead to contemporary beliefs in afterlife, which a large Chiusine urn now in Palermo demonstrates¹⁶. A balding man on the right takes his wife by her wrist, as she tenderly touches his head with her right hand. A winged demon already grasps the woman from behind, while a second demon comes through a doorway on the left. What distinguishes this piece from the Volterranean urn just described are the inscriptions in the crowning moulding of the frieze which identify all the figures. Various members of the Afuna family are saying good-bye to [Has]ti Afunei, the wife standing on the right who is also the woman reclining on the cover. These people lived, and obviously believed in the existence of demons, such as Culsu, the demon on the left. In other words the physical corporeality of the demons underlines their existence, very much like angels on New England tombstones. More commonly inscriptions on the covers of the urns identify those buried within. The deceased is not just named, but his parents, his

(9) *Ibid.* pl. 129 N^{os} 1-3 (Florence, Villa Ernesto Rossi; Cortona; Perugia, Volumni Tomb respectively) boar-hunt; Vol. II pl. 59 N^{os} 6-7 (Volterra 321 and Florence 78484) Calydonian boar-hunt.

(10) *Ibid.* Vol. III pl. 121 N^{os} 7-8 (Siena; Chiusi 753).

(11) L. B. WARREN, "Roman Triumphs and Etruscan Kings", *JHS* 60 (1970) p. 62 n. 81; BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* III pl. 85 N^o 4 (Volterra 173).

(12) *Ibid.* pl. 91 N^o 2 (Volterra 155) compared especially to the child on the third panel of the senatorial procession of the Ara Pacis, for which see E. NASH, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie des antiken Rom I* (1961-1962) p. 70-71 fig. 67-70.

(13) BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* III pl. 65 N^{os} 4-5 (Berlin 1277; Florence, Antinori) leave-taking; pl. 70 N^o 2 (Volterra 121) journey to the Underworld. The same sense of family and togetherness is reflected in the large tombs used by families over long periods of time, such as the Tomba Inghirami from Volterra and now in Florence. For its urns, see *CUE* I p. 84-119. On the social origins of such tombs in the Orientalizing period, O. BRENDL, *Etruscan Art* (1978) p. 45. 483 n. 3.

(14) BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* III pl. 61 N^o 6 (Volterra 99).

(15) *Ibid.* pl. 61 N^o 5 (Volterra 98).

(16) *Ibid.* p. 62-64 pl. 54 N^o 1 (Palermo 8464); *CUE* I N^o 1812.

official position if he had one, and his life span are frequently given¹⁷. In other words the portraits and pseudo-portraits of the deceased on the lids not only complement the depiction of contemporary life on the casks, but also firmly fix the urns and their representations in a particular time.

In fact, with one small group of urns from Chiusi a direct relationship can be established between the families ordering the urns and the scenes chosen for the casks. Urns with Cacus ambushed by the Vibennae and a second group, possibly with him imprisoned, involve only three families, two of which intermarried¹⁸. The forenames of those buried within, Larth and Arnth, albeit common, nonetheless, imply that these Hellenistic Etruscans wished to recall their putative ancestors, Lars and Arruns Porsenna. The pictorial allusion to a historical event stems from the same interest in the contemporary and their activities, as the group of urns with scenes of everyday life. What the individual does currently and what his family has done in the past are what matters¹⁹. Related urns include, among others, Lars Porsenna and the monster Olta, the death of Lucretia, the Gallic sack, the Dioscuri, and possibly a fair number of those with still unidentified subjects where "Etrusco-Roman" dress is worn and Etruscan symbols, such as the *fascēs*, are portrayed²⁰.

Relatively few of the urns with historical subjects come from Chiusi; the majority were made in Volterra. While stories about local heroes, in the absence of texts and inscriptions, are virtually impossible to interpret, the ones that have been identified as "historical" reflect an interest not just in Etruscan affairs, but in how those affairs relate to Rome—an obvious theme during the Social Wars of the first century B.C. when the majority of these urns were made. In other words, the attempt of the Volterran owners of the urns to appropriate certain Etruscan events of the archaic period closely resembles the efforts of the late Roman Republican nobility to have the Roman annalists write family histories emphasizing the deeds (real or supposed) of their ancestors.

In themselves the urns with scenes illustrative of Etruscan history form only a small percentage of the entire output of narrative friezes. Yet they actually belong to a larger group — those with representations from Greek mythology. The scholarly tendency to label ancient things as purely Greek, Etruscan, or Roman has confused the issue by opposing Greek stories to local legends. Instead the two formed a

(17) For studies of the urns by family, see: J. THIMME, "Chiusinische Aschenkisten und Sarkophage der hellenistischen Zeit", *Studi Etruschi* 23 (1954) p. 25-147 and *Studi Etruschi* 25 (1957) p. 87-160; and A. MAGGIANI, "Contributo alla cronologia delle urne volterrane: i coperchi", *Memorie della Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e Filologiche dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* s. 8 vol. 19 fasc. 1 (1976) p. 1-44.

(18) For a full study of the nine urns involved, see J. P. SMALL, *Cacus and Marsyas in Etrusco-Roman Legend* (1982) Chapter II p. 37-56; BRUNN, *Rilievi* I pl. 84-85 N^{os} 1-3 (Florence 5777, Siena 730, and Berlin SK 1281); BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* II pl. 119 N^{os} 1-2 (Siena 734 and Florence 5801).

(19) This idea is surely related to Roman funerary practices where the ancestors are paraded before those attending the funeral, and the funerary elogia extol the deceased's and his family's deeds (Polybius 6, 53-54).

(20) BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* III pl. 8 N^{os} 1-2 (Volterra 350 and 351) Lars Porsenna and Olta; II pl. 103 N^{os} 1-2 (Volterra 499 and 494) death of Lucretia; III pl. 113 N^{os} 1-2 (Volterra 440 and 259) Gallic sack; II pl. 37 N^{os} 1-2 (Volterra 413 and 265) the Dioscuri; and pl. 101 N^{os} 3-4 (Volterra 195 and Florence 5709) banquet scene with figures carrying *fascēs* on the right.

continuous whole for both the Hellenistic Etruscan and Roman²¹. To the Etruscans, tales about Greek heroes concerned the earliest period in their history. The selections from Greek mythology which appear on the urns support this interpretation, for in contrast to Roman sarcophagi, no stories about gods and goddesses appear²². In fact, only Diana and Venus are depicted, and even then never as the protagonist, but only as a helping deity²³. The frequent presence of demons, associated with the Underworld, is a different matter; for they assist in various ways in getting the deceased to the Underworld²⁴. Like the gods they do not appear on the urns in scenes devoted to their independent *res gestae* — assuming that stories just about them existed. Only heroes — be they Greek or Etruscan — appear.

By far the largest group of urns shows scenes from the Trojan cycle, and the episodes chosen are significant because of the Trojan sympathies displayed. Trojan heroes like Paris are prominent, while the Greek heroes either are shown ignominiously (ambushing Troilus, sacrificing Iphigenia) or suffering dastardly deaths (Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus)²⁵. Odysseus belongs to this category and to a second one — Greeks who went to Italy²⁶. It is not so much that only “Italian” adventures of such figures appear on the urns, as that their presence in Italy has generated an interest in them in contrast to those Greeks who travelled East. Thus Jason and the Argonauts are entirely absent from the repertory²⁷, but Hippolytus who, according

(21) Compare A. MOMIGLIANO, “Time in Ancient Historiography”, in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (1977) p. 191: “Others, like Varro, formulated a distinction between different periods of human history according to the varying reliability of the evidence... What myth meant to the Greeks before history was invented in the fifth century I do not claim to know, but to the historians myth meant something less well known than an ordinary happening...”.

(22) There is one exception: Perugia, Villa Bordoni (BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* II pl. 1 N° 1) with a gigantomachy. Several urns have been incorrectly identified as the abduction of Persephone by Hades, because a winged, fishy-tailed monster does not belong in such a scene. Hence the interpretation is left open in *CUE* I p. 50 N° 54 (Volterra 400). For the whole group, see BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* III p. 1-5 pl. 1-3 N°s 1-5 (Volterra 183, 379, 182, 172, and 400).

(23) The only securely identified Venus, or better Turan, appears on urns with the recognition of Paris where she protects Paris from his attacking brothers (BRUNN, *Rilievi* I pl. 1 N°s 1-3; Volterra 234, Vatican 13898, and Volterra 223 respectively). The statues of “Vanth-Aphrodite” on Volterra 374 (BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* II pl. 18 N° 3) with the deaths of Eteocles and Polyneices are obviously a different matter.

Diana may appear at the sacrifice of Iphigenia (BRUNN, *Rilievi* I pl. 45 N° 20, Villa Giulia 50312). Note that the female figure with the hind is generally considered a “Nymph” of Diana (so BRUNN, *Rilievi* I p. 6. 45 pl. 41 N° 11—Villa Giulia 50313). See also HELBIG⁴ III p. 471-473 N° 2492 (Dohrn); and also discussion below here.

(24) See notes 13 and 16 above.

(25) See note 24 above for the recognition of Paris and the sacrifice of Iphigenia. BRUNN, *Rilievi* I pl. 51 N°s 7-8 (Florence 5755, Volterra 376) Achilles ambushing Troilus; *ibid.* pl. 74 N°s 1-2 (Volterra 348, Louvre) death of Agamemnon; *ibid.* pl. 77 N°s 4-5 (Siena 729; Chiusi, Tomba di Poggio al Moro) deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

(26) Several adventures of Odysseus are depicted: Polyphemus — BRUNN, *Rilievi* I pl. 86 N°s 1-2 (Florence 5779 and 5778); Circe — *ibid.* pl. 88 N°s 1-2 (Florence 5780 and Volterra 336); the Sirens — *ibid.* pl. 92 N°s 3-4 (Volterra 283 and Florence 5782); and the Suitors — *ibid.* pl. 95 N° 5 (Volterra 428).

(27) There are two exceptions. Amycus being bound to the tree by Pollux is probably represented due to interest in the Dioscuri: BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* II pl. 35a (Perugia G 345). Volterra 497 (*ibid.* pl. 1 N° 2) is one of the rare terracotta urns from Volterra and the only late Etruscan urn with the flight of Medea.

to some versions (Verg. *Aen.* 7, 761-782), escaped to Italy to become the companion of Diana of Aricia, is not²⁸.

The next sub-group of the mythological is rather heterogeneous. Although heroes, and particularly young ones, are the focus, the stories seem to be less about "historical events" and more concerned with hortatory lessons of not challenging or defying the gods and moral law. Here belong urns with scenes of death: (1) those who murdered their relatives (Alcmaeon, Orestes, Eteocles and Polyneices)²⁹; (2) those guilty of homicide (Oinomaos, Myrtilos)³⁰; and those who offended divinities (Dirce, Actaeon, Hippolytus)³¹. Actaeon, Hippolytus, Meleager, Iphigenia, and the Leucippidae are curious³², because together they form a sizable group symbolizing offenses against Diana.

The last mythological group portrays heroes against monsters. The Etruscans as seafarers were fond of certain travails with the sea, be it the Sirens, Skylla, or the Ketos who attacks Andromeda³³. Several depict the Etruscan Sphinx — a hermaproditic, winged, horse-bodied creature with the skull of one of its victims beneath a paw³⁴. The Minotaur appears on a handful of urns, and probably reflects the Etruscan delight in monsters and interest in Daedalus, who fled to Italy, rather than in Theseus, who, as an Athenian hero, is otherwise totally ignored by the Etruscan sculptors³⁵. Centaureomachies and Griffins attacked by Arimasps also occur³⁶.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from this survey. Unlike the Archaic period in Etruria which eschewed the divine and the mythological in favor of scenes from daily life, the Hellenistic period added the legendary to the repertory. In both eras funerary overtones remain constant — be they in the games and dances associated with funerals on the Archaic urns or in the leave-takings and ceremonies of the later casks³⁷. Conspicuous by their absences were divinities and mortals who achieved divinity, such as Hercules and Ariadne, both types which were popular on Roman

(28) The death of Hippolytus appears on urns. BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* II pl. 34 N^{os} 3-4 (Siena 728 and Chiusi 526).

(29) *Ibid.* pl. 27 N^{os} 3-4 (Florence 78480 and 5741) matricide of Alcmaeon. For the death of Clytemnestra, see note 26 above; for the deaths of Eteocles and Polyneices, note 24.

(30) BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* II pl. 41 N^{os} 2-3 (Florence 5703 and 78479) the death of Oinomaos; pl. 53 N^{os} 1-2 (Volterra 220 and Florence 93484) the death of Myrtilos.

(31) *Ibid.* pl. 4 N^{os} 1-3 (Volterra 359, 468, and Berlin 1278) the punishment of Dirce; pl. 3 N^{os} 1-3 (Vatican 13889, Volterra 357 and 356) the death of Actaeon; for Hippolytus see note 29 above.

(32) For Actaeon, Hippolytus, Meleager, and Iphigenia, see above, notes 32, 29, 9, and 24 respectively. BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* II pl. 38 N^{os} 3-4 (Volterra 266 and 590) the abduction of the Leucippidae.

(33) For the Sirens, see note 27 above. BRUNN/KÖRTE, *Rilievi* III pl. 13 N^o 6 (Perugia 53) Skylla; *ibid.* II pl. 39 N^o 1 (Volterra 330) the Ketos and Andromeda.

(34) *Ibid.* pl. 6 (Volterra 355).

(35) *Ibid.* pl. 32 N^o 3 (Florence 5696) Theseus and the Minotaur. Also represented are Daedalus fashioning the cow for Pasiphae (*ibid.* pl. 28 N^o 1—Volterra 335); and Daedalus and Pasiphae just after the birth of the Minotaur (*ibid.* pl. 29 N^o 5—Volterra 434).

(36) *Ibid.* pl. 68 N^{os} 3-4 (Volterra 272 and 292) Centaureomachy; and *ibid.* III pl. 37 N^{os} 1-2 (Volterra 352 and 416) Arimasps and Griffin.

(37) For a discussion of choice of subject on Archaic Etruscan funerary urns from Chiusi, see J. BAYET, "La sculpture funéraire de Chiusi", *MEFRA* 72 (1960) p. 61-69.

sarcophagi³⁸. The Hellenistic Etruscans could have chosen these figures for their urns, for they appeared on other "objects," like Ariadne in the Cività Alba pediment³⁹. In other words, whether conscious or not, rules of selection were followed. The scenes had to show "true" events, real activities which extolled the past and exemplified the present. What actual Etruscans did and believed — the focus on the current and the immediate — separates and defines late Etruscan funerary art.

Jocelyn Penny SMALL.

(38) For example, KOCH/SICHTERMANN, *Röm.Sark* p. 148-149 fig. 166-169 (Hercules); p. 193 fig. 228-229.235 (Ariadne).

(39) BRENDDEL, *o.c.* n. 13, p. 424.427 fig. 324.
