

New Perspectives on Etruria and Early Rome

In Honor of Richard Daniel De Puma

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The Blood of Animals

Predation and Transformation in Etruscan Funerary Representation

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If the ritual remains silent, one can ask . . . what is proclaimed by the image and the myth.

—J.-P. VERNANT, "A General Theory of Sacrifice and the Slaying of Victims in the Greek *Thusia*"

In the context of an Etruscan social landscape that functioned as a theocracy, the Etruscan elites ruled through the control of religious as well as secular power. Their control was reinforced by religious ritual and the sacrifice of animals, which was intimately connected to feasting in a religious context. Hunting, banqueting, feasting, devouring, and consumption, both literal and metaphorical, are at the heart of Etruscan funerary imagery, and in this sense the Etruscans may not be all that different from their neighbors. Yet a peculiarity of Etruscan imagery has not been explained or carefully studied: natural hierarchies are reversed as animals devour humans as well as each other, and they do so not infrequently and in interesting and dramatic contexts.

Etruscan art is replete with animal imagery, especially in the Orientalizing period under the influence of both Near Eastern and Greek prototypes, particularly Corinthian pottery. The animals are usually the so-called fantastic creatures such as sphinxes, griffins, chimeras, and centaurs, as well as real animals like lions and panthers that are not indigenous to Italy and that may have seemed just as fantastic as the composite creatures to an Etruscan. Animal friezes are encountered primarily on small-scale objects and have invariably been considered decorative, thereby stripped, according to the hierarchies of classical art, of any real cultural or social meaning.¹ Some of these friezes may indeed be primarily decorative, but recent scholarship on the

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meaning of Etruscan iconography has shown repeatedly that specific visual signifiers, iconographic units that may have a very specific meaning in a Greek context, will take on an entirely different meaning in an Etruscan context.² In some cases a specific visual representation can have several meanings in Etruscan art—meanings that are understood only when the visual text is explicated through identifying inscriptions. A “fantastic” animal that has one meaning in a Greek context might mean something entirely different in Etruria, just as the Greek meaning will differ from the Orientalizing prototype. And, parenthetically, it is worth noting that even in Greek art, at least in the early periods, there is debate about the meaning of fantastic creatures; witness the recent exhibit entitled “The Centaur’s Smile,” which addressed this question for the Greek world.³

In Etruria the very ubiquity of animal imagery as well as its range of contexts argues for a different interpretation. Fantastic animals are found on elite prestige items as well as other contexts. Most apposite are funerary representations, where, given Etruscan attention to the tangible expression of concepts of the afterlife, choices in the manner of decoration were proscribed. The construction of Etruscan funerary imagery relies heavily on animal representation. In Tarquinian painted tombs, for instance, animals are often shown in subsidiary friezes or in the tympana of pediments on the back wall of the tomb, imagery that became eponymous in many cases but that begs for further study. These animals are placed in an area that is usually considered less important than the main frieze. Do they play any pivotal role in the funerary meaning of the decorative program? Are they even part of something that we might call a program? The Etruscan animal frieze had a long history, and a wide range of uses and contexts, but what is its meaning in funerary settings?

THE ANTHROPOPHAGOUS ANIMAL

Animals interact and in fact often attack and devour one another. When humans get involved, the interaction is often one-sided. Humans, invariably male, flee from the animals. Most peculiar, however, are the instances where animals devour humans. We do not actually witness humans being devoured; what we see is the result of predation, an animal with a human limb hanging from its mouth. The imagery is not entirely specific, for we do not see the beginning or the end, or the intention and the meaning. What we find repeatedly is an animal, invariably a feline, with part of a human, most often a leg but sometimes much of the torso, hanging from its mouth.

The anthropophagous animal is both widespread and specifically Etruscan. It first appears in the Orientalizing period: for instance, on the bronze couch fitting from the Bernardini Tomb at Palestrina,⁴ or on the numerous animal friezes found on vases and other prestige items of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. The motif is quite common on early bucchero, where the anthropophagous feline can be part of an animal procession. On an olpe in the Louvre, it is combined with a griffin, a dog, and even a horse and a human.⁵ On a kantharos from Vulci in the Villa Giulia Museum,

the continuous frieze includes two anthropophagous lions, horses, antelopes, and two trees, one in the form of a rather Phoenician-looking palmette that may have been intended to evoke the "tree of life."⁶ The motif is more rarely presented as an antithetical pair of animals, as, for instance, on a spectacular bucchero sottile oinochoe in Brussels, where the heraldic composition is carefully arranged to create a visual axis with the open mouth of the lion-shaped pouring spout.⁷ The other figural elements in the frieze are again an antelope, horse, and tree. There are more elaborate combinations as well, as, for instance, on a rare, elaborately decorated buccherò stamnoid olla from Veii with four incised panels (fig. 13.1).⁸ Here two felines hold in their jaws the entire lower part of two humans. Another lion devours a rabbit, and other animals include a winged horse, bearded sphinx, deer, bird, and griffin. As if this were not enough, a single panel shows a pair of nude male boxers.

Admittedly it is not always humans that are being ingested; other animals dangle from the lion's maw as well, but that humans are being devoured is both singular and striking. The motif reorders the food chain, disturbs the natural order, and cuts against a most basic human taboo.⁹ And anthropophagous animals are found on vases that would be used at aristocratic banquets, or vividly displayed on elite furniture. Although the anthropophagous motif is not found in Greek art, it is so pervasive an image that it makes its way under Etruscan influence into the visual culture of other Italic peoples, and eventually even into the Celtic world. The most interesting instance of these iconographic peregrinations is the depiction of anthropophagy on the Certosa situla, found in an Etruscan tomb at Bologna.¹⁰ Heavily influenced by Etruscan prototypes, it depicts an elaborate couch with two animal terminals. The animals are possibly lions—identification is always difficult in the context of the loose representations of Venetic art—from whose jaws dangle both an animal and a human. And below, in another register, as if to punctuate the point, is a predator with a human leg in its mouth, now the real thing rather than a furniture ornament.

LATE ETRUSCAN FUNERARY CONTEXTS

How can this characteristically Etruscan image be explained? One possibility is that fantastic animals that devour bodies, human or otherwise, symbolize the carnivorous nature of death. Thus all these animals, whether composite creatures such as sphinxes or centaurs or mere fantastically exotic lions, would mediate human existence by connecting life to death, serving as a kind of metaphor for the decaying materiality of human existence. This is a plausible explanation, but is the process really so linear, from life to death, from consciousness to nothingness, given that the Etruscans had some clear notions about the very tangible nature of life after death? Is the anthropophagous lion no more than a demonic psychopomp? Or is there a more dialectical structure, with life leading through death to life again, with consumption leading to transformation? A few rare but no less interesting examples of anthropophagy in later, fourth- to third-century funerary contexts suggest that the question is complex.

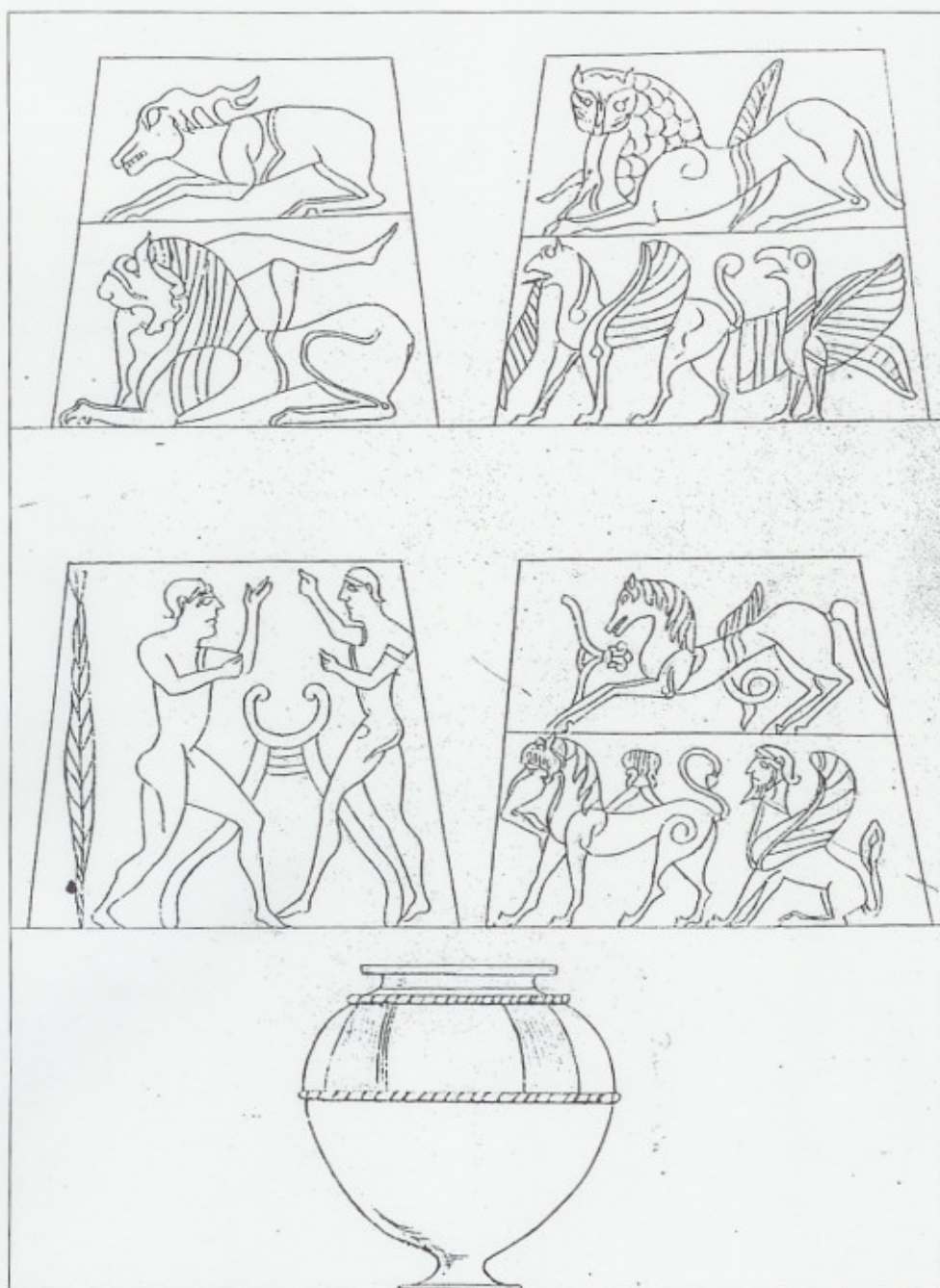


FIG. 13.1. Stamnoid olla from Veii (Campanari 1839, pl. 1).



FIG. 13.2. Amazon sarcophagus, short side (Soprintendenza della Toscana).

A case in point is the well-known Amazon sarcophagus in the Florence Archaeological Museum, the funerary casket of an elite Etruscan woman, Ramtha Huzcnai, the mother or possibly the grandmother of a magistrate, according to one of its two inscriptions.¹¹ Dated to the mid-fourth century, the sarcophagus is best known for its polychrome friezes depicting combats between Greek warriors and Amazons, which have been used to reconstruct the changes that took place in Greek painting in the Late Classical period.¹² A secondary source of interest has been the content of the battle scenes, for even if Amazonomachies are not unusual in Etruscan funerary art,¹³ their presence on the sarcophagus of an elite Etruscan woman raises some interesting questions of gender and patronage, especially in the context of Etruscan society, where women played an unprecedented role. But of special interest are the scenes found at each end of the lid of the sarcophagus, in the pediment of the building that is evoked by the temple-like shape of the sarcophagus itself (fig. 13.2).

These scenes depict what has been universally interpreted as the death of Actaeon. The compositions are virtually identical. That this is Actaeon is made clear by

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the antlers that sprout from the hunter's head, but not entirely clear here is what this scene would have meant to an Etruscan patron or viewer, or what exactly this scene is doing in this particular context. Transformation is clearly a theme, as is the shedding of blood, for Actaeon is in each case superimposed over the central axis of alternating combats: on one side the Amazon gets the better of a Greek, while the opposite outcome takes place on the other short side. Actaeon is over-scaled in terms of the pedimental space. He bursts the boundaries, and his body is pushed forward, splay-legged and exposed to the viewer, reeking with overtones of the sacrificial victim. The head protrudes above the surface of the tympanum and becomes almost an acroterion in the way that it shapes the top of the façade. The unabashed frontality, the pushing of the figure to the surface, makes Actaeon seem as naked as he is nude. Notable is the lack of struggle or of pain. Actaeon seems more interested in what is in front of him—what lies ahead, if you will—than in the fact that his dogs are eating into the soft parts of his thighs.

The symmetry of the composition, the arrangement of a crosslike Actaeon, and the way that the hunter reaches out to place his hand on the backs of his dogs evoke another archetypal motif, the Master of the Animals. And nowhere is there any evidence of the divinity who has caused the transformation.¹⁴ There is irony in Actaeon's complete control; he subverts divine power by assuming the pose of the Master of the Animals, the *despotes theron* or *potnios theron*. Actaeon has become both sacrificial victim and divine force. The imagery is thus quite different from conventional Etruscan scenes of Actaeon's metamorphosis, which normally illustrate the divine instigator, Artemis.¹⁵ The iconography of Actaeon has been subverted to form a different narrative that seems Etruscan rather than Greek, and the specific instance of a hunter's transformation has become universal; an androphagous scene has become anthropophagous. Amazons and Greeks seem interchangeable below; Actaeon and divinity have become one above. Male and female, human and divine, are exchanged and counterbalanced. Equilibrium of existence is created through transformation, and at the same time a hierarchy is established. The placement of Actaeon in the privileged space of the pediment—breaking the boundary of the triangle as a kind of acroterion—evokes the meaning of Etruscan architectural practice, where the ridge of the roof is treated as a sacred or heroic place. The transformation of Actaeon has intimations of apotheosis.

A comparable scene is found in the Tomba della Mercareccia at Tarquinia. The tomb's decoration has unfortunately not survived but is known from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century renderings (fig. 13.3), the most reliable of which were published by Micali.¹⁶ The painted frieze that wraps around the wall of the tomb shows animal combats, and inserted twice is a composition of a kneeling man with arms outstretched into the mouths of two animals. In this case the animals, if we can rely on the renderings, are lions rather than dogs. The compositional resemblance to the Actaeon of the Amazon sarcophagus is strong, even if in this case the scene may not



FIG. 13.3. Tomba della Mercareccia, Tarquinia (drawing by Micali, published in Dobrowolski 1997, pl. 8).

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represent Actaeon. Whether Actaeon or not, the scene still presents us with an ontological paradox: anthropophagy results in transformation. The scene is represented twice on the walls of the tomb's upper chamber, inserted into the context of scenes of ferocious and bloody animal combats; the scenes are contrasted to the *Tierkämpfen* that wrap around the upper wall of this chamber.¹⁷

Even more intriguing is Dobrowolski's suggestion that this scene has a peculiarly Etruscan meaning that might be understood through later Roman sources that hint, all too briefly to be sure, at a peculiarity of the Etruscan belief system.¹⁸ If these sources are to be trusted, the Etruscans believed that humans could achieve immortality through the assumption of animal forces. The sources are twofold. Arnobius states that the *Libri Acherontici* of the Etruscans promise that "by offering blood of certain animals to certain divinities, souls may become divine and escape the condition of mortality."¹⁹ More specific is a second source, Servius (*Ad Aen.*), quoting the second-century C.E. writer Labeo in a treatise entitled *De diis animalibus*, who says that certain ritual sacrifices can transform human souls into gods, and that these gods are called animals as a reminder of their origin. How reliable is this evidence?²⁰ Although late in date, the fact that there are two sources, and that the sources are of entirely different character—one a grammarian quoting earlier texts, the other an early Christian writer antagonistic to pagan sacrificial ritual—suggests that there is more here than anti-pagan propaganda, that there is a vestigial memory of earlier funerary practice, one that is extraordinary even by pre-Christian standards. The notion of immortality through animal sacrifice is not found elsewhere in the Mediterranean; it is a concept that the great scholar of Etruscan and Roman religion, Georges Dumézil, acknowledged as uniquely Etruscan.²¹

Is this the meaning of the anthropophagous scenes in these two funerary contexts? Van der Meer has argued that there is no tangible evidence of Etruscan funerary sacrifice in the fourth and third centuries, the period of the Mercareccia and Amazon sarcophagus representations,²² although altar-like elements may be found as the centerpieces of pedimental compositions that feature antithetical fantastic animals.²³ The concept of immortality through an animal spirit has been known for some time and has even been linked to Orphism in ancient Italy.²⁴ But what has not been taken into account is the earlier evidence that establishes the possibility that earlier Etruscan visual culture, specifically that of the seventh to the fifth centuries, might reflect this particular belief. There is in fact a great deal more evidence that can be brought to bear on the problem: evidence of Etruscan funerary sacrifice in earlier periods.

FUNERARY SACRIFICE IN ETRURIA

Just as the anachronistic Actaeon/*potnios theron* of the Amazon sarcophagus intimated that later Etruscan imagery has roots in the Orientalizing period, new archaeological discoveries show that funerary sacrifice is deeply imbedded in earlier Etruscan ritual practice. This is clear at Cortona, where a large funerary altar forms

part of the perimeter of an Orientalizing tumulus tomb.²⁵ The altar is monumental, with a typical Etruscan stone podium and a monumental staircase that leads to the platform of the altar proper. The antae of the staircase are decorated with a pair of large stone sculptures that show a mortal combat between a man and a sphinx.²⁶ The sculptures date to the end of the seventh or beginning of the sixth century and are part of a funerary structure that was clearly connected to the cult of the dead but was monumental and visible to the living. In each case a massive seated sphinx has within its grasp a male warrior, kneeling at an oblique angle, driving a sword into the side of the predator. The top of the warrior is entirely engulfed in the maw of the sphinx. It is a remarkable image of two beings becoming one while at the same time killing each other, but also remarkable is that these figures are the only figurative elements of a large funerary structure. The arrangement of the two figures in each group takes on a specific contextual and spatial meaning; the human connects to the space in front of the temple, the human domain, while the animal connects to the sacred space of the structure itself. Through animal combat, anthropophagy, and the shedding of the bestial blood, the sacred structure connects the human realm with the world of the divinized ancestors buried in the tumulus that forms the backdrop for the altar. The human figure kneels in front of the animal with a knee touching the ground, a visual signifier of sacrifice or death in Etruscan art.²⁷ The sphinx, the composite animal, is now not just a guardian, not just a mediator, but an active figure of transformation. While shedding its blood, the human figure is engulfed and ingested by the sphinx, perhaps becoming more than human.

The scale of the Cortona altar, apart from the sculptural decoration, is indicative of ancestor worship on a scale that suggests heroization if not actual deification.²⁸ Other early evidence for heroization through sacrifice is found at Pisa, where Bruni has carefully and beautifully excavated a tumulus with a large stone altar placed at its summit.²⁹ The altar seems to have been used and then ritually broken. Still on the altar when excavated were traces of a sacrificial knife, four iron spits, an iron trident (again, ritually broken), and the jaw of a horse. Because the main chamber of the tumulus did not contain a body, Bruni surmised that the tomb belonged to an Etruscan noble, a *princeps gentis*, who had been lost at sea. Most interesting is the fact that the upper part of the tumulus was used as a cemetery from around 700 to the fifth century, a place for smaller tombs for succeeding generations of descendants of the noble ancestor. Here the altar has become the centerpiece of an elaborate genealogical setting that connects the living with the dead and that endows privileged status through connection with a hero-ancestor, possibly one whose status has been ritually established through the sacrifice of a horse and the destruction of the altar. This new evidence lends support to the visual intimations of death, sacrifice, and immortality in Etruscan funerary contexts.

Sacrifice is represented in a later Etruscan funerary context in the case of the Tomb of the Orcus II, where on the entrance wall is depicted an animal being led toward

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sacrifice in the direction of the doorway. The context of this scene, which may include young members of the family celebrated in the tomb, has led Roncalli to interpret it as a chthonian sacrifice that allows access to the underworld.³⁰ In this kind of ritual and social context, the scene of the death of Actaeon may have carried a very different meaning to an Etruscan. The divinely caused transformation from human to stag, a transformation that in classical art is a punishment that causes an ignominious death, may have been viewed by an Etruscan as part of a sacrificial ritual ensuring the immortality of the hero-ancestor. In the case of the pediment of the Amazon sarcophagus, several clues support this interpretation:

- (1) the placement of the Actaeon scene directly above the figure of the dying Greek warrior, emphasizing the role of blood sacrifice;
- (2) the way that Actaeon mirrors the pose of the warrior, especially in the important gesture of having a knee touch the ground, a pose that in Etruscan art suggests sacrifice, prophecy, and connection to the underworld;
- (3) the placement of Actaeon in the pediment, a place of privilege symbolizing the connection between roof and ground;
- (4) the way that figure is pushed forward and over-scaled on the plane of the tympanum, suggesting a sacrificial victim;
- (5) the heraldic nature of the group, with Actaeon reaching out to touch the dogs, without sign of struggle, reminiscent of *potnios theron* iconography;
- (6) the unusual way that the head of Actaeon protrudes from the top of the pediment, becoming a kind of acroterion or ridge-pole decoration.

The connection to the roof is particularly important, for the ridge of the roof on Etruscan monumental buildings was a privileged place, sometimes decorated with lifesize statues that created narratives on the roof.³¹ Recent scholarship has emphasized this particular Etruscan aesthetic, quite different from the Greek treatment of the temple roof. The statues literally walk the sky, defining a space that connects the human viewer below with the gods above, establishing a clear human-divine spatial hierarchy. The unusual composition and placement of the Actaeon pediment plays into this hierarchy, and its iconography has connections with roof decoration of much earlier date: the early phase of the monumental complex at Murlo, where the roof ridge was decorated with so-called cutout acroteria, most of which seem to have been in the form of highly stylized human figures.³² Of special interest is a relief-modeled acroterion that shows a singular scene of a central human figure who is being attacked—bitten—by two animals (fig. 13.4). At first glance these animals seem snake-like, but the heads are clearly feline.³³ This composition is a seventh-century antecedent of the fourth-century Actaeon; it would have been placed at the end of the roof ridge, directly over the crest of the pediment. The central figure would have been held aloft by the felines; here again we find the tension and ambiguity of a human figure that is simultaneously being devoured and displayed.



FIG. 13.4. Terracotta relief-modeled akroterion from Poggio Civitate (Murlo) (photo A. Tuck).

Since the discovery of the Murlo terracottas, there has been much debate about the nature of the human figures on the sixth-century building (fig. 13.5). Interestingly, little attention has been paid to the wild variety of animals that also adorned the roof, and the fact that human figures are displayed here together with fantastic animals.³⁴ Some scholars have argued that the female and male enthroned figures represented divinities, while others have argued vehemently that the figures were human, possibly the ancestors of elite Etruscans who used the sixth-century monumental complex. The distinction may be more of a modern construct than an

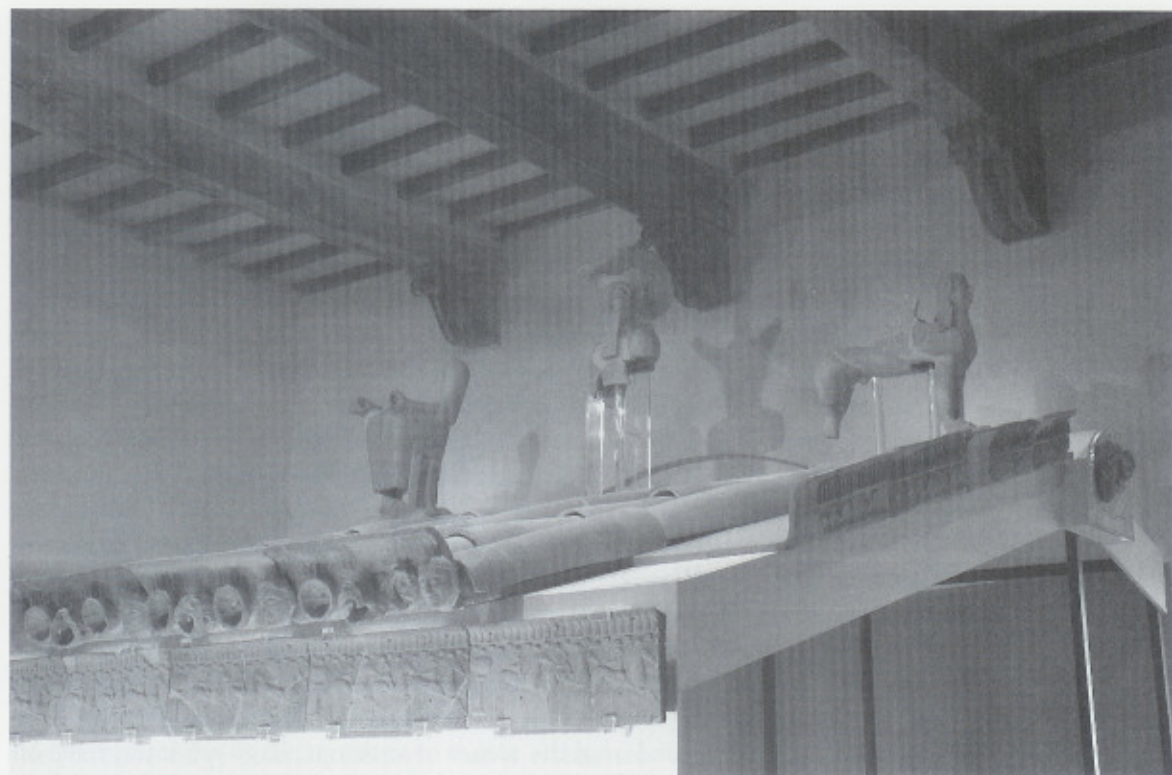


FIG. 13.5. Roof of the sixth-century monumental complex at Poggio Civitate (Murlo) (photo A. Tuck).

Etruscan reality, for if elite Etruscans could become immortal, then the statues might represent individuals who are both human and divine, and what better place to do this programmatically and metaphorically than on the ridge of the roof? What better way to represent the Etruscan theocratic elite and their ascendancy? As Tuck has recently noted with respect to the earlier program of terracotta decoration at Murlo, "Etruscan rulers sought to utilize eastern motifs not simply as a matter of fashion or preference, but specifically because leaders at sites like Poggio Civitate understood their usefulness and suitability as expressions of longstanding, divinely sanctioned political authority."³⁵

Such a conflation of nobility and divinity has some textual basis as well. In a recent study of the wrapping of the Zagreb mummy, our only surviving Etruscan *liber linteus*, which contained a series of prayers to the gods, Rix has shown the constant reference there to gods as noble, underlining the social connection between Etruscan nobility and Etruscan divinity.³⁶ What we find in Etruscan art is a continuum from human to noble and then to immortal. In terms of imagery there is of course a vast

difference between the funerary sacrifice of animals in order to obtain immortality and images of humans being devoured by animals. It might be argued that they are exact opposites, unless of course we interpret such scenes metaphorically. The animal consumes the human—or is the human consumed by the animal in order to subsume the animal's power? The animal consumes the human, while the human assumes the animal; such an interpretation explains not only the ubiquity of the imagery, but also its placement in elite contexts: for instance, on banqueting vases or even as decoration on elite banqueting furniture. It also explains the contradictions of the Actaeon iconography, where the consumed human becomes a godlike Master of the Animals. And it is not coincidence that many of the Orientalizing friezes that include anthropophagous imagery also include the age-old motif of the tree of life. A case in point is a recently published Orientalizing kantharos in the Princeton Art Museum, which has a prototypical composition of the tree of life flanked by composite fantastic animals, with farther to one side a very satisfied seated lion ingesting the energetic, lively lower torso of a nude male.³⁷

The tree of life and the anthropophagous animal are at once contradictory and complementary, and in this sense both elements connect to the continuum of sacrifice, a continuum of life and death. As Hubert and Mauss have noted, "This vitalizing power of sacrifice is not limited to life here below, but is extended to future life. In the course of religious evolution the notion of sacrifice has been linked to ideas concerning the immortality of the soul."³⁸ Thus the metaphor of death is life itself, but life on a very different plane, and once the scenes of anthropophagy are interpreted on a metaphorical level, an entirely new question emerges. If humans and animals in Etruscan art can interact in this seemingly singular manner, what does it say about the meaning of animal imagery in general, especially of that animal imagery that interrogates the human condition in Etruscan funerary settings?

TRANSFORMATION AND ETRUSCAN ANIMAL IMAGERY

The idea that immortality can be attained through the transformative power of animals, at least those fantastic animals that populate Etruscan art, and that this is a characteristically Etruscan point of view, may provide new insight into a broader range of Etruscan visual culture. I would like to touch upon some possible new readings of Etruscan representations that have seemed enigmatic to the modern eye. I do not mean to propose new solutions, for much will remain ambiguous, but there are new avenues for investigation. A good example is the animal imagery found in Etruscan painted tombs, imagery that, again, has been thought to be primarily decorative. This interpretation results from our own tendency to privilege the human over the animal, and the overtly narrative over the symbolic, and to suppose that hierarchy is determined by size rather than placement on the wall of the tomb—that is, to privilege the central frieze of the wall. While we tend to emphasize the human, the narrative, and the larger part of the decoration, an Etruscan might have considered

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the animal as important as the human, the symbolic representation as important as a narrative frieze, and the pediment as a place of greater importance than the area below it, as is borne out by the Etruscan aesthetic of roof decoration.³⁹

An Etruscan spatial hierarchy emphasizes the central axis of the tomb chamber, moving from the human realm depicted in the continuous frieze of the wall to a pedimental area that is normally the realm of powerful fantastic creatures, and then on to the ceiling, which is often brightly decorated. A prime example is the Tomb of the Lionesses (fig. 13.6), where a central niche that probably held an urn is directly under the central element of the frieze, an enormous krater that holds the wine for the banquet and festivities, which is placed directly under the hierarchical lionesses in the pediment. Thus death, wine, and predatory animals are all connected in a vertical hierarchy that places the animals at the top. Another case where animal symbolism is given privilege of place, much later in date, is the careful arrangement of *Tierkämpfen* so that the shedding of blood coincides specifically with spatial punctuation, as, for instance, over the doorway of the François Tomb, where the animal's blood falls directly over the center of a lintel.⁴⁰

Even more interesting is the way that predatory animals dominate the programs of the earliest Etruscan painted tombs. In some cases the imagery becomes even more explicit, and felines are seen attacking and devouring their prey, as in the Tomba Cardarelli or the Tomba del Maestro delle Olimpiadi.⁴¹ These animals dominate the privileged space of the pediment and articulate a central axis that reflects the axis of the roof, the ridge-pole, an element that is elaborately and assiduously decorated in many Etruscan tombs. In other cases, for instance tomb 1646,⁴² tomb 3098,⁴³ and the Tomba dei Baccanti⁴⁴ at Tarquinia, predatory animals are still dominant but are subsumed into a broader context, and the central element of the pediment, usually interpreted as a column post, is elaborated and, as Roncalli has pointed out,⁴⁵ begins to resemble an altar rather than a functional architectural support. On the early Tomba dei Leoni di Giada,⁴⁶ the element is clearly an altar with upturned volutes at the corners and its upper surface decorated with rosettes. In the Tomba dei Tritoni the eponymous composite creatures flank the column/altar and touch its volutes.⁴⁷ In fact the placement of the altar-like element directly over the lintel of a false door, signifying in Etruscan art the passage to the afterlife,⁴⁸ subverts any architectural function while clearly connecting the blood of predation, through sacrifice on an altar, to the progression of the Etruscan elite to the afterlife.

The transformative nature of animal sacrifice may also surface occasionally in mythological representation, for Actaeon is not the only Greek mythological character who might be transformed in an Etruscan setting. Jason may have an Etruscan particularity as well. Neils has noted that "the aspect of Jason's quest that most appealed to Etruscan taste was his ingurgitation by the dragon, an event undocumented in extant literature."⁴⁹ It is worth noting that the extant literature referred to is Greek, and that the scene of Jason and the dragon is found only once in



FIG. 13.6. Tomb of the Lionesses, Tarquinia (photo author).

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Greek art. It is, however, far more common in Etruscan visual culture, as on a detail of a bronze mirror in Berlin, where Jason's leg is being swallowed by the dragon.⁵⁰ If this reading seems recondite, then there is an Etruscan red-figure column krater in Perugia,⁵¹ where we see a hero, identified by Neils as Jason but by others as Hercules, dealing with a much larger dragon, a monster on the scale of Jonah's whale that seems quite capable of easily ingesting the human. Now the hero enters the monstrous jaws willingly, drawing his sword. If that detail were not enough to let us know the outcome, the heroically nude hero has taken his cloak, a voluminous mantle with a decorated border that speaks to his elite standing, and pulled it over his head. This is a specific gesture; is it the act of a priest who covers his head before sacrificing the victim? An Etruscan reading of the scene would not ignore the intimations of sacrifice and rebirth.⁵² It does not matter for our purposes whether the hero here is Jason or Hercules, for the nature of the hero is to transcend his humanity.

It may well be that to an Etruscan, the image and idea of a hero had intimations of divinity that might apply to the elite viewer. This might explain the popularity of the imagery of Hercules in some unlikely places: for instance, on the Monteleone chariot in the Metropolitan Museum, where Hercules wrestles the Nemean lion alongside animal combats in a subsidiary frieze, seemingly out of place but perhaps associated with the imagery of the apotheosis of a hero/warrior shown in the main panels.⁵³ Another instance is the seeming incongruity of the terracotta friezes from sixth-century Acquarossa.⁵⁴ These frieze plaques juxtapose scenes of banquet and *komos* with warrior iconography and scenes of Hercules' struggles with the Cretan bull and Nemean lion. The iconography seems incongruous until interpreted in the context of human-animal conflict.⁵⁵ Immortality and sacrifice make excellent sense in a programmatic representation that glorifies the dynasty of the theocratic elite.⁵⁶ Here, admittedly, we have moved far beyond the rather explicit imagery of Etruscan funerary art, the specific anthropophagous imagery of the Amazon sarcophagus. But if indeed the Etruscans believed that humans could achieve immortality through animal sacrifice, through assuming some aspect of the animal's power, then it is a corollary that in this context other types of human-animal interaction must have connotations of this characteristically Etruscan belief.

Another context that reeks of both sacrifice and animal transformation is the Tomb of the Bulls at Tarquinia.⁵⁷ The central scene of Achilles waiting in ambush, literally preparing to sacrifice Troilus, has been well studied, but it is worth noting that this is an exceedingly rare mythological scene in an Etruscan painted tomb. The scenes above have proven to be more enigmatic and controversial, for just as rare are the sexually explicit scenes in the register that runs above the doors. These scenes have been studied in the context of Dionysian connections to the afterlife, which seems appropriate, and sometimes have been looked at from the viewpoint of gender,⁵⁸ but perhaps the more telling detail is that of the eponymous bulls. The indolent one on the right is simply an animal, but the sexually charged and charging bull on the left

is part bull and part human. The importance of this image of transformation was pointed out by Thomas, but in the context of the transformative power of animal sacrifice, and given the careful spatial arrangement of scenes of sacrifice, transformation, and transgression, a case can be made for intimations of immortality.

One final example is the Tomb of the Augurs at Tarquinia, whose imagery is redolent of the Etruscan theocracy.⁵⁹ Rarely discussed is the imagery of the pediment, where a lion and a spotted feline savagely maul an antelope. What has been much debated, however, is the grim scene of a Phersu overseeing a bloody combat between a hooded man and a savage dog, both of whom are controlled by leashes held by the Phersu. There is a world of controversy here: whether this is an actual Phersu or a human dressed as Phersu, whether this is the antecedent of gladiatorial games, and, more importantly, what exactly is represented here, and what this savage contest, not unique to this tomb but rare in Etruscan art, might mean. But telling is the symbolism of pitting human against beast in a blood sport in the context of the shedding of blood in the pediment.

CONCLUSION

The funerary sacrifice of animals and the imagery of anthropophagy can be reconciled metaphorically and situated dialectically in a social and existential continuum. The animal consumes the human; the human assumes the animal. This symbolism may explain the popularity of the imagery and its placement in elite contexts. It also explains the incongruous nature of the Actaeon on the Amazon sarcophagus, where the consumed human becomes the Master of the Animals. Especially telling is that the anthropophagous animal is found in Etruscan art from as early as the Orientalizing period, and that this type of representation is deeply embedded in Etruscan art. Death is by its nature a transformative experience and was to the Etruscans a rite of passage; transformation was attainable through ritual. This ritual praxis needs to be placed firmly in the social hierarchies of Etruria, where a relative few controlled the many through both religious and secular power. By controlling the transformative process itself, by harnessing the blood of beasts and the power of primal animal forces, the Etruscan elite may have attempted to enshrine permanently its status at the pinnacle of this social landscape.

NOTES

This chapter found its original form as a presentation at the 2006 annual meeting of the College Art Association in Boston, as part of a panel chaired by Alexandra Carpino and entitled "A Taste for Violence: Images of Cruelty and Death in Etruscan Art." I am grateful to Professor Carpino for her comments, as well as the helpful remarks of the respondent, Professor Anthony Tuck, and of other members of the panel and audience. The session was attended by Richard De Puma, whose presence added greatly to the event. His acute observations were, as always, accompanied by the friendly and intellectually lively demeanor that has made him such a valued colleague over the years.

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1. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see Warden 2004, 51–57.
2. A good example of such a visual signifier is the mutable motif of the “lunging aggressor” analyzed by Helen Nagy at the 2006 annual meeting of the College Art Association in Boston: “The Lunging Aggressor: Language of Heroism, Conflict and Aggression in Late Etruscan Funerary Art.”
3. Padgett 2003.
4. Canciani and von Hase 1979, pl. 47, 1–2.
5. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. C 563; Bonamici 1974, no. 77, pl. 38.
6. Bonamici 1974, no. 46, pl. 23.
7. Brussels, Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, inv. A 777; Bonamici 1974, no. 55, pl. 26.
8. Present whereabouts unknown. Published by Campanari 1839, 13–15, pl. 1, according to Bonamici 1974, 30, who reproduces Campanari’s drawing as pl. 14.
9. A taboo that in modern times has been exploited repeatedly by the horror genre: e.g., films like *Jaws* and *Jurassic Park*. Or, as a South African official put it after a series of dramatic attacks by great white sharks: “Emotionally it’s a lot harder when people get consumed. It changes perceptions” (quoted in Trofimov 2005).
10. Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983, pls. 168–69.
11. Colvin 1883; Bocci 1960; most recently Harper 2004, which emphasizes the sacrificial aspects. For illustrations: Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983, pls. 212–16.
12. Brecolaki 2001, 21–25.
13. Camporeale 1959.
14. The scene of Actaeon’s metamorphosis is not uncommon on Etruscan urns, and Artemis is often shown. For the iconography in its Etruscan contexts, see Lacy 1994.
15. For instance, Körte 1896, pl. 3.
16. Jannot 1982; Dobrowolski 1997, with previous bibliography.
17. For such scenes: Hölscher 1972.
18. Dobrowolski 1997, 128–48.
19. Arn. *Adv. nat.* 62: “Quod Etruria libris in Acheronticis pollicetur, certorum animalium sanguine numinibus certis dato divinas animas fieri et ab legibus mortalitatis educi.” See also the discussion in Camporeale’s chapter (14) here of these two sources.
20. For a detailed discussion of the concept: Jannot 1998, 58, 67–70.
21. Dumézil 1970, 668–69.
22. Van der Meer 2004, 61: “There are, however, no indications that animals were slaughtered in funerary rites during the fourth or third centuries BC.”
23. Van der Meer 2004, 61, citing Roncalli 1990.
24. For a summary, see Pfiffig 1975, 380.
25. Considered an altar by the excavators, but the presence of coeval architectural terracottas including an acroterion suggests the presence of a temple or naiskos nearby, possibly on top of the tumulus: Bruschetti and Zamarchi Grassi 1994, 46.
26. See Zamarchi Grassi 1992, pls. 25–29.
27. The motif is found on the Amazon sarcophagus, in both the battle scene and the Actaeon representation. It is common in Etruscan battle scenes, as well as in scenes of sacrifice, and deserves more study. For a sacrificial context: Brunn and Körte 1896, 2: pl. 81.
28. The question of divinization as opposed to heroization is a difficult one, and it may be that the two concepts came to be conflated. For heroization see Jannot 1998, 69–70.
29. Bruni 1998, 105–7.

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30. Roncalli 1997, 44: "permet d'identifier le lieu comme un accès à l'Hadès et ce sacrifice comme un sacrifice chtonien."

31. For the most recent discussion of gods "walking on the roof," see Winter 2005.

32. Rystedt 1983.

33. The connection of this imagery to Actaeon was first pointed out by Lacy 1994, 173. The acroterion is discussed in detail by Rystedt (1983, 75–76, fig. 42, with previous bibliography), who connects the imagery with the *despotes theron* motif (p. 135).

34. For which see Newland 1994.

35. Tuck 2005, 135. I am grateful to Professor Tuck for making his manuscript available to me before publication.

36. Rix 1997, 393.

37. Published as part of an exhibition by Padgett 2003. While the iconography of the frieze is characteristic of the Etruscan Orientalizing period, the style of the incision is unparalleled and lacks the loose spontaneity of authentic Etruscan work of this period. While I have reservations about the authenticity of the incised decoration, the construction of the scene, whether of the seventh century B.C.E. or of more recent date, is based upon good Etruscan models. As is the case with so many of the objects in this exhibit, the lack of provenance is at issue.

38. Hubert and Mauss 1964, 64.

39. The Etruscan predilection for ornate roof decoration *within* the tomb, as well as attention to the particulars of structure, might also be indicative of this interest. See Naso 1996.

40. For the door as symbol of the afterlife, see Scheffer 1994. For the animal friezes: Cristofani 1967.

41. Tomba Carderelli: Moretti 1970, 100–101. Tomba del Maestro delle Olimpiadi: Moretti 1970, 132–33, 134.

42. The altar-like column post is flanked by two felines: Moretti 1970, 44–45.

43. Moretti 1970, 54. In this case the column post is flanked by felines, resembles an altar, and is decorated with an ivy leaf.

44. Steingraber 1984, pl. 24.

45. Roncalli 1990, 236, connecting the altar/column support to the reference to sacrifice in Arnobius.

46. Steingraber 1984, 323, no. 79; for a better illustration, see Moretti 1970, 33.

47. Moretti 1970, 64–65, 70.

48. For which see Scheffer 1994.

49. Neils 1994, 192.

50. Neils 1994, 192 fig. 17.5.

51. Neils 1994, 193 fig. 17.6.

52. The action of the hero also parallels the Etruscan motif of the deceased passing into the underworld, sometimes through an arched gate. See Scheffer 1994.

53. Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983, pls. 105–7.

54. Olofsson 1984, 25 fig. 2; 26 fig. 1.

55. Especially interesting is the juxtaposition of Hercules' struggle with the bull and an elite figure being chauffeured in a chariot drawn by winged horses.

56. Apposite is Cerchiai's discussion of Hercules iconography and the banqueting imagery of the Acquarossa frieze plaques, especially the detail of the large knife held by one of the banqueters. As

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Cerchiai points out, the detail is incongruous, for an elite male banqueter would hardly be "carving the roast." This clear referent to sacrifice might thus be connected to the imagery of the hero-god's apotheosis: Cerchiai 1995, 87–88.

57. Steingraber 1984, pls. 157–65. Especially interesting is the decoration of the subsidiary chambers, where the pediments are emphasized. The central elements (column supports or altars) are especially ornate, and there are interesting juxtapositions of fantastic creatures.

58. Thomas 1994.

59. Steingraber 1984, pls. 13–22, esp. 20.

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