

THE ORIGIN OF TOMB PAINTING IN ETRURIA

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Abstract

Tomb paintings and other artistic categories such as stone sculpture had their origin in Etruria in the second quarter of the 7th century BC, when local elites received goods and customs from several regions of the eastern Mediterranean. Near Eastern and Greek craftsmen migrated to Etruria from at least the end of 8th century BC and influenced the style of Etruscan art, which also developed from local Iron Age roots. The earliest paintings are concentrated in Veii and Caere in southern Etruria, where they were used to emphasise architectural elements and to depict animals, perhaps with a symbolic meaning.

8th Century BC

At the beginning of the 8th century BC, the mid-Tyrrhenian coast, corresponding to modern southern Tuscany, northern and southern Lazio, and northern Campania, was one of the most developed regions in all Italy – if not *the* most developed. Fertile land, as well as natural resources, among them metals, salt and timber, played an important role and provided the material conditions for this growth. In particular, Etruria, the land to the north of the Tiber, which constituted the natural boundary with Latium vetus, was experiencing an important moment of transition: from village to city.¹

Thanks to several years of systematic field-walking campaigns,² centres such as Tarquinia allow us to follow the long process of urbanisation. The surface distribution of potsherds shows that the Iron Age settlement spread over the entire area of the ancient city, for more than 150 ha, and allows us to recognise a single huge settlement. This was probably divided into several residential units of different sizes, or units comprising several residential and functional buildings, laid out so as to cover the whole available area, and separated from each other by narrow zones free of buildings. These zones may have been used as outdoor work areas, as well as for growing crops or raising livestock. This tentative reconstruction may be useful not

* This paper is based on the text of a lecture delivered in Oxford in June 2009 in the graduate seminar series devoted to Etruscan Archaeology, History and Art. I would like to thank Nicholas Purcell and Irene S. Lemos for their invitation, David Ridgway for correcting my English, Sybille Haynes and all the participants for the stimulating discussion after the lecture. Gocha Tsetskhladze kindly invited me to publish the text in *AWE*.

¹ Pacciarelli 2000.

² Mandolesi 1999.

only for Tarquinia but also for other centres in Etruria in the first half of the 8th century BC. All these signs indicate the existence of a complex but changing society, in which it was possible for individuals to change their own social status. Some graves, with their rich *corredi* (sets of grave-goods), reflect very clearly the high rank of the so-called princes or princesses.³

As reflected by the *corredi* in several cemeteries in Etruria, the *aristoi* of the second half of the 8th century BC felt the need to display their huge wealth; they therefore began to look for external cultural models to represent it. The best available were in the eastern Mediterranean;⁴ they were brought to the West through trade along commercial routes that were first developed by the Phoenicians. The role of these traders, long misunderstood, has been reassessed since the 1980s by many scholars who have emphasised the Phoenician influences on material culture in both Etruria and Latium.⁵ Some finds, such as an inscribed Phoenician bronze bowl from a grave of the third quarter of the 8th century BC, and a seal of the Lyre Player Group from a grave of the early 7th century BC, have been made in Vetulonia.⁶ The find place of these imports is not coincidental, because in this period Vetulonia probably controlled the iron mines on Elba and in northern Etruria. Iron as well as copper and minerals like alum, and the so-called invisible goods, were among the important natural resources of Etruria. These, along with the knowledge of skilled craftsmen (such as metalworkers) can explain both wealth and the overseas contacts that facilitated its display.

The presence of Greeks, namely Euboeans, is definitely later than that of the Phoenicians, despite new discoveries like the pendent-semicircle skyphoi probably from Euboea found at Veii and Caere and dated to the first half of the 8th century BC.⁷ Greek Geometric vases in Etruria are associated with the diffusion of wine. The hydria from Sopra Selciatello grave 160 at Tarquinia has been assigned to a date around the middle of the 8th century BC; the large krater from Pescia Romana, attributed to the Cesnola Painter and dated in the last quarter of the same century, was perhaps a gift from Greek colonists to a member of the local elite.⁸

³ Iaia 1999; Rathje 2000.

⁴ Rathje 1988.

⁵ Martelli 1991; *I Fenici* 1995; Geppert 2006; Gubel 2006. Especially for Latium: Botto 2005.

⁶ For both finds, see von Hase 1995, 266–67 (seal), 268–70 (bronze bowl), with previous bibliography. The production of Lyre Player Group seals has been doubtfully assigned to North Syria or Rhodes (Huber 1998, 114–18, fig. 7, with previous bibliography).

⁷ These problems have been discussed recently by d'Agostino 2006a–b. New finds from Caere have been illustrated by Rizzo 2005a. Information about the results of Neutron Activation Analyses carried out on pendent-semicircle skyphoi from Central Italy has been anticipated in Naso 2008a; forthcoming.

⁸ d'Agostino 2006a, 338–39 (hydria from Tarquinia); Canciani 1987, 242–43, no. 3 (krater from Pescia Romana), both with previous bibliography. On the diffusion of wine and wine culture in Central Italy, see Menichetti 2002; Bartoloni 2006.

The Orientalising Period

The beginning of the Orientalising period in Etruria is dated to the last quarter of the 8th century BC by important finds, such as the Bocchoris situla and its *corredo* at Tarquinia.⁹ This period is characterised by a greater distribution of luxury goods from the eastern Mediterranean, transported by people of various languages and origins along complex maritime trade routes; there were similarly revolutionary consequences in Greek culture.¹⁰ Etruscan cities like Vulci, Tarquinia, Caere or Veii are still in need of exploration, but small settlements, where excavated, show clearly that in the first half of the 7th century BC deep transformations occurred in society; they are discernible in the shift from huts with thatched roofs to houses with tiled roofs.¹¹

The growth of some centres, such as Caere, was sudden and explosive: in the Banditaccia necropolis at Caere, only a few generations divides the *pozzo* graves from the chamber tombs contained in huge tumuli, the diameter of which can reach 60 m. It has been supposed that both tumuli and stone decoration had their origins overseas, because there are no intermediate steps in the change in type of funerary deposition, and the tumuli are decorated on the top of their bases with the earliest stone mouldings in the history of Italian architecture.¹² Because they have a perfect form and in Etruria there is no intermediate stage, it has been supposed that they were introduced by an architect from elsewhere. This region has been identified as North Syria, the only district offering some parallels. Anthropomorphic sculpture had, for instance, its origins in this period: the Tomb of the Statues near Caere, dated to the first quarter of the 7th century BC, has been attributed to North Syrian craftsmen.¹³

In the single graves dated to the second quarter of the 7th century BC, the Etruscan love of luxury (ancient Greek *tryphé*) was satisfied through Oriental imports (*keimelia*). Carved ivories of North Syrian style, exotic materials like *tridacna squamosa* shells, ostrich eggs, glass vases, gold jewellery decorated with the granulation technique, and bronze ribbed bowls were first imported, and then produced, in

⁹ The bibliography on this subject has recently been discussed by Falsone 2006.

¹⁰ The classic treatments of Orientalising culture in Etruria are Strøm 1971; Ampolo *et al.* 1984; *Principi* 2000; Prayon and Röellig 2000. Gubel (2006) has drawn attention to the many Near Eastern components of the Etruscan Orientalising style.

¹¹ Rasmus Brandt and Karlsson 2001. On the Greek presence in Etruria, see Della Fina 2004; 2006; 2007. On the results of recent researches in southern Etruria, see Moretti Sgubini 2001a–b; Paoletti 2005.

¹² Naso 1998, with previous bibliography, recently augmented by 'Tumuli as Sema. International Conference on Space, Politics, Culture and Religion in the First Millennium BC' (Istanbul, 1–3 June 2009).

¹³ Colonna and von Hase 1986.

Etruria by Oriental craftsmen and their Etruscan pupils.¹⁴ Near Eastern workers trained apprentices in Etruria, so that we can distinguish among: 1) Near Eastern works imported to Etruria; 2) Near Eastern works realised in Etruria; and 3) Etruscan works inspired by Near Eastern style.¹⁵ The items of jewellery granulated with Etruscan inscriptions, like a later fibula from Castelluccio di Pienza near Siena, are a product of the mobility of skilled workers of Near Eastern origin, who might be responsible for the introduction to Italy not only of these new techniques, but also of other artistic forms.¹⁶

Notwithstanding the spread of Oriental customs, luxury goods and techniques to Etruria, we must not forget or underestimate Greek influence, which was often inextricably mixed with Near Eastern influence, as shown for example in the adoption of the banquet.¹⁷ Some very rare imports came to Etruria from the Greek world, and are particularly concentrated in the tombs at Caere. Particularly significant is a Cycladic amphora, recently identified by M.A. Rizzo as one of the very few examples of this (probably Thera) type that has been found outside the Cycladic islands. It was perhaps brought to Italy via the complex sea trading routes, within which many people of various languages and origins were operating.¹⁸

Archaeological evidence shows that the Etruscans received objects relating to a new way of life from the Near East, and mythology from Greece;¹⁹ and from both they received cultural models. It is possible to recognise characters from the Homeric epics in some painted ceramics from Caere dated to the first half of the 7th century BC, such as the vase from Monte Abatone grave 297 showing a male and female couple, painted by an Etruscan, or the seemingly slightly later krater signed by the Greek Aristonothos.²⁰ Other Mediterranean regions like Cyprus played an important role, too; it is reflected in the cultural links with Sardinia and

¹⁴ For the carved ivories, see Huls 1957; Rocco 1999. For the *tridacna squamosa* shells, see Rathje 1986a. For the ostrich eggs, see Rathje 1986b (a new find from Matelica is illustrated in Silvestrini and Sabbatini 2008, 190–93). For the glass vases, see Martelli 1994. For the gold granulations, see Nestler and Formigli 1995. For the bronze ribbed bowls, see Sciacca 2005. Martelli (2008) provides an overview.

¹⁵ This was possible for the bronze ribbed bowls (Sciacca 2005) and for other decorated bronzes, among them the Plika'sna situla (Martelli 1973). For important observations regarding the treatment of *orientalia* in Etruria, see Sannibale 2008, 363–64.

¹⁶ For the fibula, see *Principi* 2000, 325, cat. no. 439.

¹⁷ Rathje 1990; 1995.

¹⁸ Rizzo 2000; 2001, with colour photograph. For the tomb group, see Rizzo 2005b; 2008. For the edition of two important *corredi* from Caere (Monte Abatone, grave 4) and its neighbour (Monte dell'Oro), see Rizzo 2006; 2007.

¹⁹ For the introduction of Greek myths to Etruria, see Rizzo and Martelli 1993.

²⁰ For both vases, see Martelli 1987, 261–62 cat. no. 37 (vase from Monte Abatone), 263–65 cat. no. 40 (Aristonothos' krater). Recently on the subject, see Martelli 2001.

Etruria, based from the Bronze Age onwards on the exchange of technologies, especially those relating to metallurgy.²¹

Etruscan Tomb Painting

The changing Etruscan society of the 7th century BC offered ideal conditions for skilled workers, who, as we have seen, came to Italy and to Etruria from regions of the eastern Mediterranean such as North Syria and Greece. These craftsmen had the opportunity of testing and realising new techniques and new ideas for their rich Etruscan customers. This was because Etruria had been developing its own ways of life and of death.²² Can we also explain in this way the origin of the new mode of painting the walls of chamber tombs? We will return to this proposal when we have reviewed the present state of our knowledge of tomb painting in Orientalising Etruria.

In the 7th century BC, painted tombs are documented in many Etruscan cemeteries: the map (Fig. 1) shows most of the cemeteries with tumuli and tombs dating back to the Orientalising period (the toponyms in capital letters indicate the geographical distribution of painted examples). These graves are concentrated in southern Etruria, where all the most important graves dating to the 7th century BC were painted. The solid tufa walls of the Etruscan chamber tombs permitted the conservation of these paintings, which were unfortunately executed using a rudimentary technique: directly onto the stone walls, without any type of plaster.²³ In a few cases a thin layer of clay was used, which permits better and longer conservation of the colours. Some painted tombs were found and described in the 18th century, but often their subjects and colours are now completely lost. In these cases, we are forced to use the documentation of the last century, consisting mostly of descriptions – or, if we are lucky, of watercolour reproductions of the painted scenes.

Even though these conditions are not ideal, they permit us to emphasise the importance of the Etruscan painted tombs, which represent the oldest group of wall paintings in the western Mediterranean.

²¹ Many contributions on the role of Cyprus have been recently edited by Bonfante and Karageorghis 2001. Recent syntheses about Sardinia have been offered by Lo Schiavo 2006 and (with another perspective) Botto 2007.

²² Naso 2007.

²³ A synthesis of the technique of Etruscan tomb painting has recently been provided by Vlad Borrelli 2003.

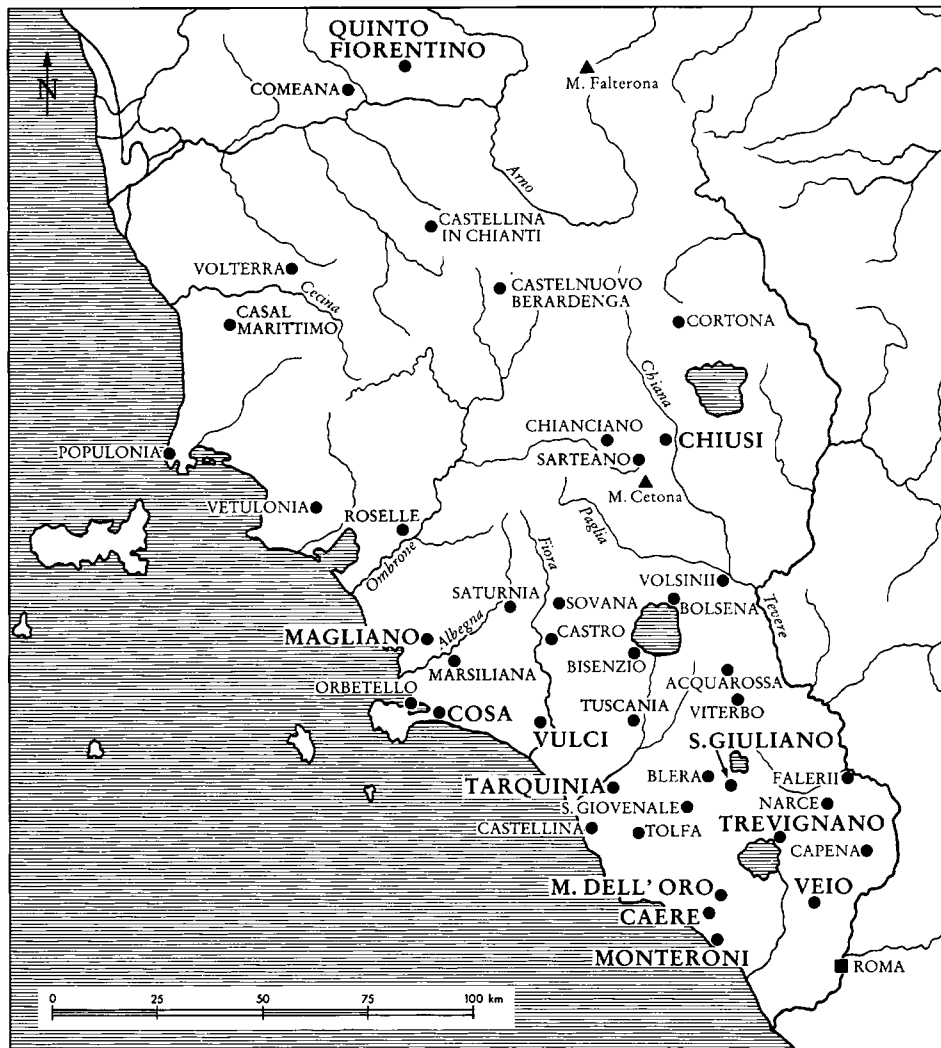


Fig. 1: Distribution of painted tombs in Etruria in the 7th century BC (after Naso 1995).

A useful contribution to the study of Etruscan tomb painting of the 7th century BC is offered by the funerary architecture (Fig. 2): in Etruscan tomb architecture of the 7th century BC the form of the painted surface was more important than the painting itself – as has often been observed in relation to Greek vase painting of the 6th century BC. Geometric and flower motives as well as human and animal figures decorated important architectural parts, such as doors or ceiling beams (the so called *columina*). This is true particularly for the cemeteries in Caere, where 12 tombs of the 26 7th-century examples that are known from the whole of Etruria are concentrated. In addition, as we shall see, Veii played an active role in the origin of Etruscan tomb painting of the first half of 7th century BC. In other words, we can identify the birthplace of Etruscan tomb painting in the region of Caere and Veii.²⁴ In sharp contrast, we have to stress that in Tarquinia, where from the second half of the 6th century BC onwards Etruscan tomb painting was particularly well developed, the painted tombs dating to the late 7th century BC are just two in number; and their subjects are not very significant. Other painted tombs were found in the 18th century in modern Tuscany, at Chiusi, Cosa and Magliano; unfortunately, these graves are now lost and we are forced to regard them as minor.

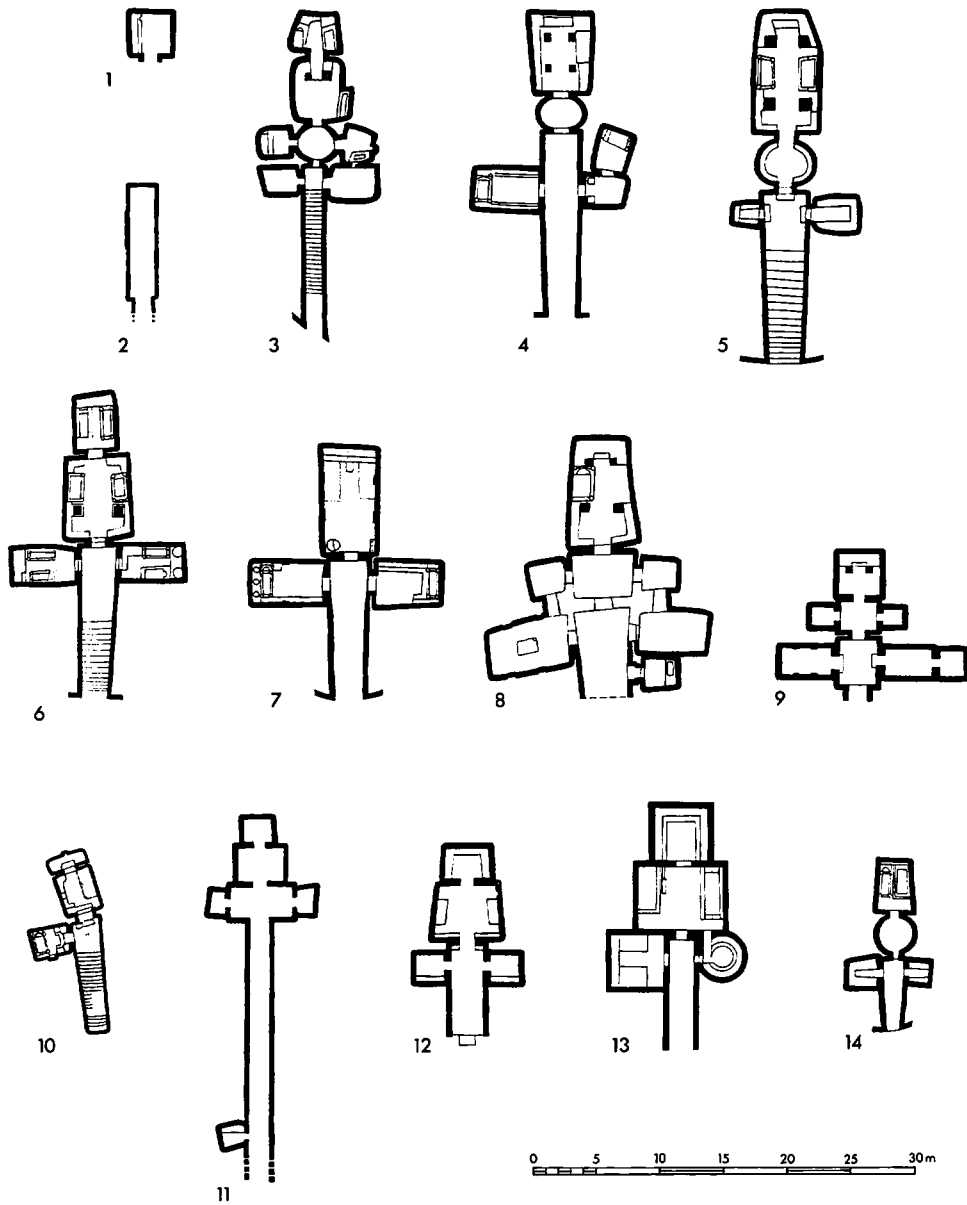
Etruscan Paintings at Veii

It is appropriate to begin our overview at Veii, where at least three major painted chamber tombs are known. There are other minor examples as well, with only traces of colours. They include the tomb (now lost) that the French architect Henry Labrousse drew in 1826; its single chamber and relatively small dimensions (1.60 m × 1.30 m) are characteristic of the painted tombs at Veii; the walls were entirely red.²⁵

The chamber tomb known as the Tomba delle Anatre, discovered at Veii in the 1960s, is not much bigger. It does not have a tumulus, because it was simply dug on the slope of a hill near other Etruscan tombs (datable more or less to the 7th century BC). The small chamber contains a funerary bed on the left (the side reserved at Caere for male depositions), and has a roof that is unique in tomb architecture: its four parts resemble the form of a textile tent, and are more like the thatched roof of a hut than the tiled roof of a house. The painted frieze is on the rear wall; its location facing the entrance door makes it very easy to see. It depicts five birds, moving to the left, in the direction of the funerary bed; their long beaks

²⁴ I have stressed the importance of architecture in the study of Orientalising tomb painting in Naso 1995, in which will be found the bibliography for each painted tomb until 1994.

²⁵ Naso 1996, 21–22, fig. 3.



1 Tomba delle Anatre (Veio). - 2 Tomba del Sorbo (Cerveteri). - 3 Tomba Mengarelli (Cerveteri). - 4 Tomba della Nave 1 (Cerveteri). - 5 Tomba degli Animali Dipinti (Cerveteri). - 6 Tomba dei Leoni Dipinti (Cerveteri). - 7 Tomba Campana 1 (Cerveteri). - 8 Tomba Cima (Barbarano Romano). - 9 Tomba del Sole e della Luna (Vulci). - 10 Tomba dei Denti di Lupo (Cerveteri). - 11 Tomba della Vaccareccia (Veio). - 12 Tomba Campana (Veio). - 13 Tomba dei Monteroni (Cerveteri). - 14 Tomba 50 del Vecchio Recinto (Cerveteri).

Fig. 2: Plans of painted tombs in Etruria dating to the 7th century BC (after Naso 1995).

identify them immediately as water birds, three in silhouette and two in outline. The drawing of the birds is rendered distinctive by the two vertical lines on the neck and on the foot; there are no parallels for this feature in Etruscan vase painting, so that one can consider them as a characteristic – almost a signature motif – of this painter.²⁶ The *corredo* of the Tomba delle Anatre does not include bucchero pottery; several other vases, in particular an Early Protocorinthian kotyle, date the deposition to the years 680–660 BC.

In this period, a good deal of evidence suggests that water birds played a role in the art and probably in the religion of the Etruscans: they arrived in Central Italy during the Early Iron Age along with the bronze vessels decorated with the so-called ‘sun boat’, executed by skilled craftsmen from Central and Eastern Europe since the Bronze Age. As to the meaning of the water-bird, a magico-religious significance has been assumed since the time of J.J. Bachofen;²⁷ and some religious connotation (a symbol of life?) is quite secure.

A frieze in another painted tomb, identified at Veii at the end of May 2006, also contains water birds, in this case accompanied by the lions that give the tomb its name: the Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti, or Tomb of the Roaring Lions. This tomb was discovered in a peculiar way. Following his arrest, a *tombarolo* (an illegal excavator) made a proposal to the legal authorities: in exchange for a shorter sentence, he would reveal an exceptionally important new archaeological find that was completely unknown to the archaeologists. The strange proposal was accepted, and an official excavation was initiated to look for the putative ‘exceptionally important’ new find. The scene of the rescue excavation was the necropolis of Grotta Gramiccia, well known in the archaeology of Veii, but not in the area identified by the *tombarolo*.²⁸ After some trenches had revealed the existence of Etruscan chamber tombs, a chamber with well preserved paintings was found; it received the name of Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti, and I myself was appointed as archaeological consultant by the Court of Justice in Rome to judge the authenticity of the paintings. The paintings are authentic, and the *tombarolo* was sentenced to two years imprisonment instead four. It is interesting to describe briefly the paintings, which are known only from news items in the Italian press and a brief description (published in a French magazine) by F. Boitani, director of the excavations in Veii for the Soprintendenza ai Beni Archeologici dell’Etruria Meridionale.²⁹ A full publication is still lacking.

²⁶ Leach 1987.

²⁷ For the Central European objects, see Kossack 1999; and more recently Szilágyi 2006, 30–33, with further bibliography. Bachofen 1989, 591–93.

²⁸ On the Grotta Gramiccia cemetery, see Berardinetti and Drago 1997.

²⁹ Boitani 2007. See also Naso 2008b.

The chamber tomb was enclosed in a tumulus, revealed by excavation in the subsequent days. This is unfortunately not documented. The entrance is a long corridor and the door is arched, as is usually the case in Etruscan tomb architecture of the early 7th century BC. The door was still sealed by the original tufa blocks, even though a few on the top had been removed, indicating that the tomb was not intact. The dimensions of the chamber are quite small, as is usual at Veii: it measures 3.50 m in length and originally 3.75 m in width. The left side was enlarged in ancient times, probably immediately after the first building phase: the traces of the original wall, which are readily visible, are shown on the useful map published by Boitani (Fig. 3). The later wall is almost 1.5 m wider than the old one. The tufa walls are polished, but not very accurately. The tufa on the roof is damaged, but its fairly dense and uniform red colour is easy to distinguish. The arched door included three stripes of colour: black, yellow, black. The same stripes in the same colours go round each wall of the chamber, probably to mark the base of the decorative field. Two water birds in bad condition can be distinguished on the entrance wall to the right of the door; on the right wall there is a row of six water birds, facing in the direction of the entrance door. The animals are shown in the outline technique, and no two are identical.

The most interesting paintings are on the rear wall. On the upper part are two rows of four water birds, facing right. All are painted in the outline technique, but a variety of interior motifs can be distinguished: one is empty, one has wings, and one has a chequerboard motif. On the lower part is a frieze of four felines, the first on the left facing right, the other three facing left. The distance between the two opposing lions corresponds to the middle line of the tomb, at the original centre of the wall. Each feline is *ca.* 40 cm long; the bodies have the form of a horizontal '8' and are dominated by a huge mouth, with sharp teeth and a big triangular tongue; the tails are very high.

The final arrangement of the chamber was later changed by three wall niches, on the front and left sides, where no animals are represented. The rectangular niche on the front wall bears three stripes, coloured black-yellow-black. The upper stripes continue on the left until the corner of the chamber, and thence beyond the enlargement of the wall. Probably just a short time elapsed between the original building and the enlargement of the chamber, because the new black and yellow stripes seem very similar to the older ones. The contents of the Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti included metal objects, among them a wagon, and some pottery of the Etruscan Geometric class. As in the Tomba delle Anatre, bucchero pottery, which was probably introduced to Veii during the second quarter of the 7th century BC, is still absent.³⁰

³⁰ For the early bucchero production in Veii, see Marchetti 2004.

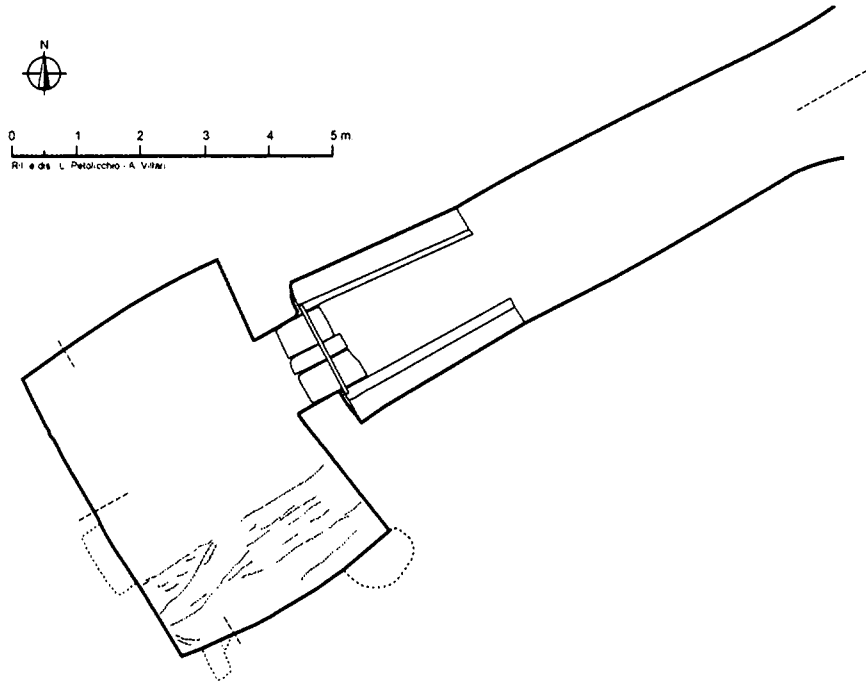


Fig. 3: Veii, the Tomb of the Roaring Lions (after Boitani 2007).

Water birds occurred in Etruscan arts and crafts from at least the 8th century onwards, probably through the influence of the Central European craftsmen of the Hallstatt culture. And they are of course well represented in early Greek vase painting, too, as can readily be seen from the illustrations in J.-L. Benson's book.³¹ A great variety in the form of the birds is quite clear.

A great variety of forms and types also dominates the early vase and tomb painting in southern Etruria (Fig. 4). Only in the rather later Subgeometric vases is a bird model predominant (Fig. 4, no. 5). This model became quite popular from the second half of the 7th century BC on Subgeometric Etruscan plates, which perhaps played a role in the funerary banquet. It is interesting at this point to compare the water birds of the Tomba delle Anatre with those of the Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti. The forms of the body and of the heads are quite similar; but it would be too optimistic to identify the same painter for both tombs. I would rather suggest that both tombs follow the same model for the birds. The detail of the two lines on the neck also occurs in the Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti. The Tomba delle

³¹ Benson 1970, pls. 24–25.

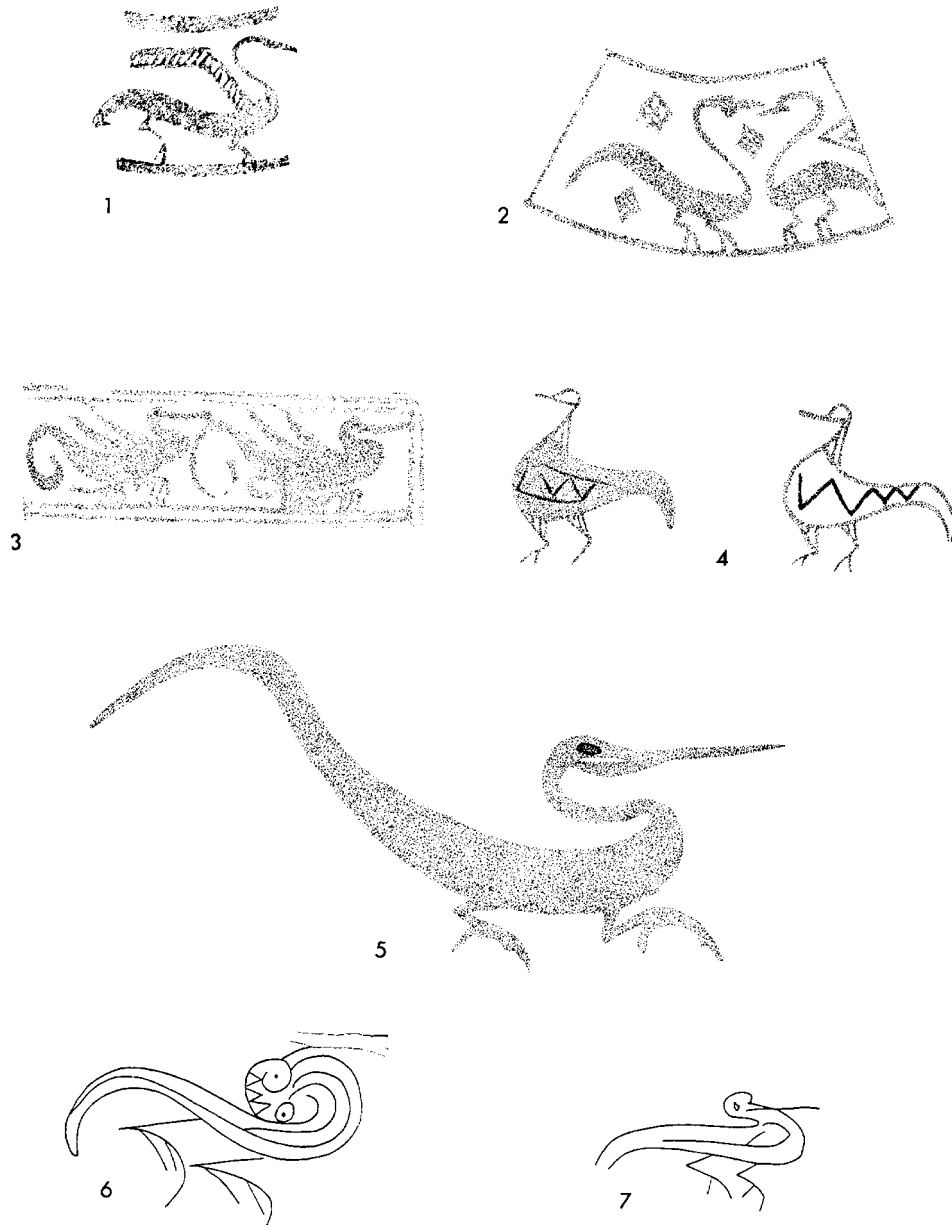


Fig. 4: Water birds from Caere and Veii

1. Vase painting. Caere, Tomba 2006, 700–675 BC; 2. Vase painting. Caere, Tomba della Speranza, 690–670 BC; 3. Vase painting. Caere, Urna Calabresi, 650–625 BC;
4. Tomb painting. Veii, Tomba delle Anatre, 680–660 BC; 5. Vase painting. Veii, Passo della Sibilla, 675–650 BC; 6. Vase engraving. Veii, Cava di Pozzolana, 675–650 BC;
7. Vase engraving. Veii, Passo della Sibilla, 675–650 BC.

Anatre and the Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti follow a similar technique: a thin layer of clay was applied to the walls of both tombs – a useful feature not only for the painter (who obtained a better spread of the colours) but also for ourselves (because the wall paintings are better preserved than they otherwise would be).

The figures of the lions naturally illustrate the difference between the two painted tombs at Veii. The lions of Veii are not at all similar to their counterparts in the tombs at Caere, which were painted directly onto the tufa walls without any kind of clay or plaster. For many reasons, I am inclined to date the two Caeretan painted tombs, degli Animali Dipinti and dei Leoni Dipinti, around the middle of the 7th century BC. The paintings have now almost completely vanished, and we can only study them through some precious watercolours. It seems that the lions of the two tombs in Caere follow the same model, as W.L. Brown noted many years ago.³² In sharp contrast, the felines depicted in the tomb at Veii are currently unique in Etruscan tomb painting, due to the form of their bodies, their huge mouths and their triangular tongues.

One can note analogous differences between earlier and later figures of lions in Greek vase painting, for instance in the late Geometric and in the Protoattic classes. For the first class one can refer to a famous clay tripod stand from the Kerameikos, showing a man subduing a lion, interpreted generally as Herakles and the Nemean Lion. The lion has a huge mouth with sharp teeth and triangular tongue.³³ For the second category, I cite two vases from Metaponto in South Italy which have recently been discussed by A. Giuliano. He assigned them to the Protoattic vase painter known as the *Schachbrettmaler* (Pittore della Scacchiera). Because the vases of this craftsman, probably a pupil of the Analatos Painter, have been found particularly at Aigina and Metaponto, Giuliano suggested that he moved from Athens to Metaponto around 700–680 BC. His lions have a detailed structure, which is clearly influenced by Near Eastern animals.³⁴

Another important Etruscan vase should be mentioned at this point; it was published by J. G. Szilágyi shortly before the discovery of the Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti at Veii.³⁵ It is an olla, now in the Museum of Fine Arts at Budapest, to which it was given (without indication of provenance) by a Hungarian art-collector. A lion and two young deer are depicted on the upper part. The characteristics

³² Brown 1960, 39–40. M. Martelli suggested that these tomb paintings could be attributed to the vase-painter known as the Pittore della Nascita di Menerva; but her proposal has not been commented on in the literature (Martelli 1987, 20, 266–67, n. 43).

³³ Kübler 1954, pl. 69, no. 407 (Athens, Kerameikos Museum).

³⁴ Giuliano 2006 discusses the vases from Metaponto.

³⁵ Szilágyi 2006.

of the lion have much in common with those of the felines in the tomb at Veii: the form of the body, the high tails, the huge mouth with the triangular tongue are all similar. Szilágyi noted the characteristics of this vase painting and assigned it to a local painter: the *Pittore di Narce*. Strong influence of Euboean craftsmen has been noted on the vases of this painter and his workshop; according to J.-P. Descœudres, they were active at Veii from at least 730 BC.³⁶ Szilágyi has suggested that the activity of this painter should be located at Narce, a 'minor' site in the *Ager Faliscus*; but, most unfortunately, he was unaware of the wall painting in the *Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti*. The nature of the new evidence provided by the tomb at Veii seems to me to be strong enough to justify the location of this workshop and its activity at Veii rather than Narce. Another characteristic typical of Veii is the form of the vase in Budapest: it has a very short neck, an element (of unclear function) that is exclusive to the pottery workshop of Veii; an exhaustive list exists,³⁷ from which I need only cite the well-known olla from the *Tomba delle Anatre*.

In sum, one can say that the wall paintings of the *Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti* at Veii are the result of the interaction of a local workshop with immigrant Greek craftsmen. The function of the tomb painting may be more than decorative: one can postulate an additional symbolic meaning, in which the water birds could represent life, while the lions may be a symbol of violent death. The *Tomba delle Anatre* belongs to the same milieu. It is very difficult to say which tomb is earlier: the architecture shows many common elements, the paintings have common roots. The frieze of the *Tomba delle Anatre* exhibits only water birds, and so it is typologically earlier. But because both tomb groups are only partly published, I prefer to suggest for the moment a similar chronology, around the end of the first quarter or the beginning of the second quarter of the 7th century BC. And I wish to emphasise the similarities in the wall paintings of Veii, both technically and iconographically, which could be the activity of a single workshop.

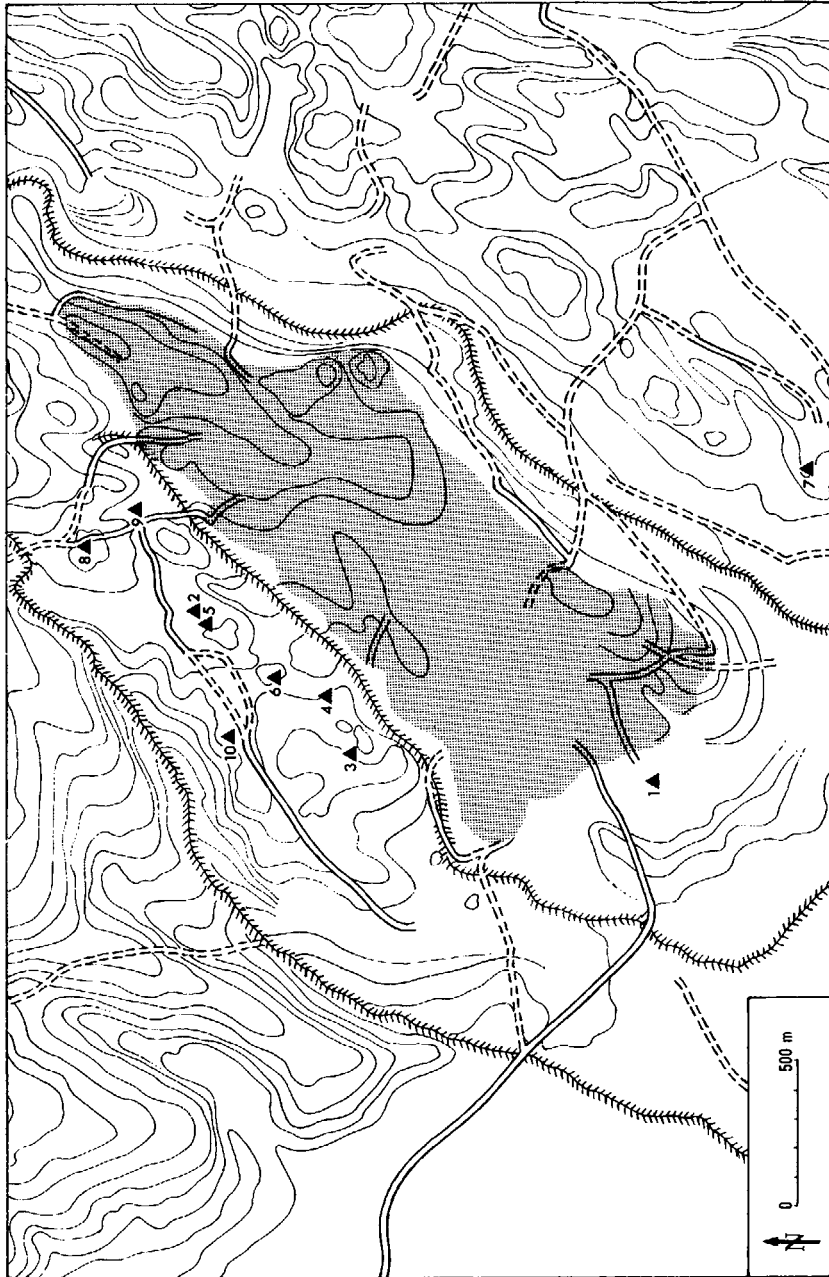
Etruscan Paintings at Caere

If in Veii we see two important monuments of early Etruscan wall painting, in Caere we have the biggest concentration in Etruria of Orientalising tomb paintings (see map, Fig. 5). One can say that in Caere painted decoration has been foreseen in each monumental tomb dating to 7th century BC.

The earliest painted tomb in Caere is contained in the *Tumulo del Sorbo*, south of the city area and not far from the *Regolini-Galassi* tomb. The tumulus has an

³⁶ Descœudres and Kearsley 1983, 30; Szilágyi 2006, 39–40, with further bibliography.

³⁷ Szilágyi 2006, 42–43.



- 1 Tumulo del Sorbo. – 2 Tumulo Mengarelli.
- 3 Tomba della Nave 1. – 4 Tomba degli Animali Dipinti. – 5 Tomba dei Leoni Dipinti. – 6 Tomba Campana 1.
- 8 Tomba dei Denti di Lupo. – 9 Tomba 50 del Vecchio Recinto. – 10 Tomba della Via degli Inferi.

Fig. 5: Painted tombs in Caere dating to the 7th century BC (after Naso 1995).

irregular plan, because its building was restricted by earlier structures; these were explored in the 18th century, and have not survived. We can have an idea of the density of this sector of the Sorbo necropolis from the plan published in 1907 by G. Pinza: the distribution of the tumuli seems to reveal the existence of a road,³⁸ which may be responsible for the irregular plan of the Tumulo del Sorbo. We should pay particular attention to the presence of tombs that are wholly built of tufa blocks, and not dug out of the rock. This expensive building technique was imposed by the nature of the area: the Regolini-Galassi and the new graves explored in San Paolo are the best known examples.³⁹ The Tumulo del Sorbo is also totally built with tufa blocks on a slope, which were forced to adopt different heights, as the section drawings show: the southern sector is higher than the northern. The tumulus is huge: its diameter is more than 62 m across, making it one of the largest in Caere (and the only one entirely built of tufa blocks).⁴⁰

Unfortunately this tumulus is only partly explored, because it was only identified in the late 1960s during the construction over it of a modern building. Legal disputes halted the excavation and the tomb was closed by a modern wall. Before it was closed, the archaeologists were able to dig completely two side chambers, and a small portion of the first chamber. After the first chamber, the Etruscan architect planned a second one, as usual in the tomb architecture in Caere: but he encountered an earlier tomb, contained in the same tumulus, which forced him to abandon this project.⁴¹ The junction area between the two tombs has no form and is now occupied by the lift of the modern building – so that in modern Cerveteri this feature is normally called the ‘Tomb of the Lift’. Both tombs have traces of painted decoration. In October 1994, when I was working in Caere on the excavation of the Etruscan city directed by the late M. Cristofani, I was obstinate enough to ask (every day) Rizzo, at the time responsible for the Cerveteri area for the Soprintendenza Archeologica dell’Etruria Meridionale, about the Tomb of the Lift. Finally, she decided to open it again for few days to check the preservation of the paintings; and on that occasion I took some photographs, which allowed me to study the painted decoration.

The ancient corridor of the tomb is accessible by a metal staircase and is presently used as a storeroom by the building’s owner. The two side chambers have not

³⁸ Pinza 1915, tav. X. Cascianelli (2003, 18–27, figs. 11–14) comments on this map.

³⁹ On the Regolini-Galassi tomb, see now Sannibale 2008, with previous literature. For the new graves near San Paolo, see Rizzo 2005b; 2008.

⁴⁰ Naso 2003, 13–23 (architecture and paintings); 2005 (ceramics and history of the excavation).

⁴¹ A similar situation is well documented at Caere, for instance in the Tomba dei Leoni Dipinti in the Tumulo degli Scudi e delle Sedie (Naso 1995, 479–81, fig. 16).

fared better. A modern wall, removed in October 1994, was inserted at the end of the corridor, at *ca.* 3m the widest in the tomb architecture of Caere.

The first chamber of the more recent tomb shows some traces of painted decoration which are not related to our subject. More relevant to our present purposes is the earlier tomb, a corridor with thatched roof and ceiling beam. Since this tomb is still completely full of earth, it is very difficult to distinguish the painted decoration. Using my photographs, along with some notes and sketches made at the time of the 1960s excavation, I can show a reconstruction drawing of the decoration of the ceiling beam (the *columen*: Fig. 6). Like the other elements in this tomb, the *columen* is almost unique: the only comparison for a painted *columen* is a minor tomb of Caere, the Tomba dei Denti di Lupo. The painted motifs on the *columen* in the Sorbo grave reappear in many other Etruscan Orientalising crafts: Phoenician palmettes are common in vase painting and in bucchero pottery; the rose ornaments in the end circles are frequent in bronze working and stone carving.⁴² The roof of a South Etruscan chamber tomb with similar decoration can also be cited in this connection: the Tomba Cima in the necropolis of San Giuliano, which is unfortunately very badly preserved.⁴³

The presence of some painted animals was noted on the roof of the older tomb in the Tumulo del Sorbo, but I have not been able to see them due to the lack of space in the chamber. Only a complete excavation of the tomb could verify this important point (but I have my doubts). Some finds help to clarify the chronology of the two tombs in this tumulus: the older tomb yielded the upper part of an oinochoe, which can seemingly be assigned to a Cumaeian workshop and dated to the first half of the 7th century BC (i.e. probably not after 650 BC). Several pottery finds come from the younger tomb, including some early Corinthian vases dating to around 600 BC. Although not directly related to our present subject, I take this opportunity to mention two exceptional and still unpublished bucchero vases from the younger tomb. The first one is an amphora clearly inspired by the form of the so-called Tyrrhenian Amphoras, but not yet documented in bucchero pottery. Metallographic analysis has identified some encrustations preserved on the surface of the vase as pure silver: although silvering decoration on bucchero at Caere is quite common, this real silver coating is unprecedented. The second vase is even more extraordinary: ten sherds belonging to the same vase, identifiable as an oinochoe, bear the remains of gold coating, sometimes with traces of superimposed incised decoration. Both vases are clearly experimental products, probably relating to the same workshop, active around 600 BC in Caere. This is not surprising, because

⁴² Naso 1996, 343–44 (rose ornaments); 2003, 19 (Phoenician palmettes).

⁴³ Naso 2003, 27–34, with previous literature.

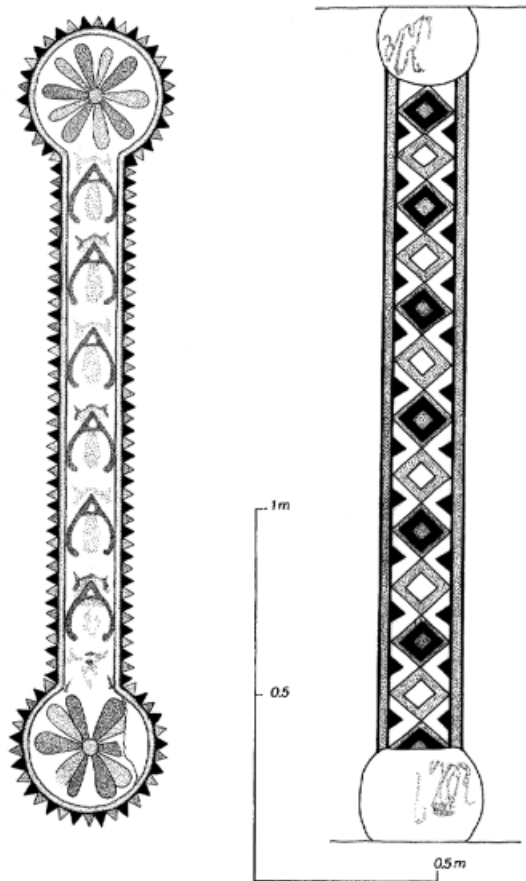


Fig. 6: Painted ceiling beams in Caere (after Naso 2003).
1. Tumulo del Sorbo (sketch); 2. Tomba dei Denti di Lupo (drawing).

bucchero pottery was first developed at Caere in the early 7th century. Scientific analysis has revealed that for fixing the gold coating onto the surface of the vase a sort of clay was used (It. *bolo*). I am still researching these two bucchero vases with metallic coating:⁴⁴ for the moment I can say that such decoration on pottery is documented in Etruria and elsewhere. To sum up: a corridor chamber, probably contained in a tumulus, was dug during the first half of the 7th century BC in the Sorbo cemetery. Around 600 BC, the tumulus was enlarged with an exceptional *crepis* wall of tufa blocks. During the construction of this tomb, the discovery of the

⁴⁴ I will publish this research together with Dr G. Guida (Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome), who executed the analysis.

old corridor chamber forced a change in the architectural plan of the new tomb. The monument belonged to an exceptionally rich Etruscan *gens*, which unfortunately cannot be identified. Although more could certainly be said under these and other headings about the Tumulo del Sorbo (including its excavation in the 18th century by Paolo Calabresi), I now leave this exceptional tomb at Caere in order to discuss a last painted chamber elsewhere.

A new Etruscan painted tomb with three chambers was found in 1984 near Magliano in the territory of ancient Vulci, where a painted tomb (now lost) was described in the 18th century. The plan is locally quite common, but the painted decoration is unique. It comprises four lions: in the vestibule, as an introduction to the deposition rooms, there is a rampant lion; another was probably painted on the opposite wall, but it has now vanished. Near the preserved lion one can note a high palmette. In the two rooms, there are three walking lions moving towards the interior of the chambers. These felines are characteristic *Mischwesen*, because each has a wing; their tongues are very long and hanging. The colours are in a very good state of preservation, perhaps the best in the entire corpus of Etruscan painting of the Orientalising period. The pottery found in the tomb, including bucchero with fans and Etrusco-Corinthian vases, suggests a date around 600 BC.⁴⁵

In this case, too, one can presume a symbolic meaning for the walking lions as creatures of another world, in much the same way as N. Spivey once described the animals painted by the Micali Painter on his vases.⁴⁶ The wings have a special value in this context. Can we presume another meaning for the rampant lion, which has no wings, but well-preserved teeth? Could this be a symbol for violent death? Our knowledge of Etruscan concepts of the underworld is somewhat restricted for the 7th century BC, but I would like to suggest this kind of interpretation.⁴⁷

Conclusions

Although the new evidence for Etruscan tomb painting enlarges our overall knowledge concerning the first half of the 7th century BC, it seems to confirm the conclusions that I suggested in 1995. The earliest tombs, like the chambers delle Anatre and dei Leoni Ruggenti at Veii, and del Sorbo at Caere, consist of only one room. Their friezes feature animals like water birds and felines, but no human figures. We can reasonably assume a symbolic meaning for these – probably a sharp contrast between life and death. Around 650 BC, tombs with several rooms and

⁴⁵ Rendini 2003, with previous literature and good colour photographs.

⁴⁶ Spivey 1988.

⁴⁷ Colonna 1989 (with previous literature) stressed the violence expressed by the lions.

complex plans begin to appear in Etruscan funerary architecture, especially at Caere and its environs. Their friezes include human figures, along with fighting or hunting felines, and are clearly intended to convey a narrative. Additional minor decoration, like plants and other motifs, begins to appear. The repertory of images became larger at the end of the 7th century BC: the friezes of the Tomba Campana at Veii and the Tomba delle Pantere at Tarquinii have symbolic meanings⁴⁸ – and it should be stressed that the latter is also highly important as the earliest document of the Tarquinian wall-painting workshops, which will be the most active from the second half of the 6th century BC. It should be remembered, too, that in Tarquinia the number of tombs with wall paintings amounts to no more than *ca.* 4% of the total number of tombs:⁴⁹ this must mean that the painted tomb was always an elite marker in Etruria.

I am profoundly convinced that the development of the early stage of Etruscan wall painting clearly shows the existence of different local traditions at Veii and Caere, although they cannot yet be defined as true ‘schools’. The use of clay as a sort of plaster is documented only at Veii, where there are relatively few single-chamber tombs with wall paintings. In Caere, on the other hand, the documentation of paintings in tombs with several rooms is more extensive, but without any form of plaster. Skilled artisans, including painters, from Caere were probably also active elsewhere – for example at San Giuliano. The geographical distribution of the monuments leaves us in no doubt that the Southern Etruscan cities played a major role in the diffusion of wall painting.

Something should be said at this point concerning the origin of the idea of painting the walls of a chamber tomb. I am not convinced that this idea came to Etruria from the eastern Mediterranean or Greece, as has often been stated.⁵⁰ The Middle Italic hut urns of the Iron Age carry a rich decoration on their external walls, which is clearly redolent of something more than their funerary purpose.⁵¹ Our knowledge of the house architecture in cities such as Veii or Caere is still too limited to exclude this important field as a possible source of inspiration for funerary architecture. The Etruscan elites of the Orientalising period developed a luxurious personal style of life and death, exemplified by paintings, other artistic categories, and above all textiles. The latter, and their reproductions, may well turn out to be a very important field; it is still unexplored.⁵² Finally, it is to be hoped that

⁴⁸ Colonna 1989.

⁴⁹ Naso 1996, 183.

⁵⁰ Giuliano (2006, 70, n. 8) presumes a Euboean origin for the painter of the Tomba delle Anatre at Veii.

⁵¹ Naso 1995, 469 for a fragment of plaster from a hut explored at San Giovenale (Viterbo).

⁵² Gleba 2008 now provides an overview of textiles in ancient Italy.

our knowledge of early Etruscan wall painting will be enhanced in future by the excavation not only of cemeteries, but also of cities: there, according to Pliny the Elder (*NH* 35. 18), ‘picturae durant et Caere antiquiores et ipsae’.

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