

# CAERE

---

EDITED BY NANCY THOMSON DE GRUMMOND  
AND LISA C. PIERACCINI



*University of Texas Press*  
AUSTIN

## CHAPTER 10

# EARLY PAINTED TOMBS IN CONTEXT

---

ALESSANDRO NASO

The changing Etruscan society of the seventh century BCE provided ideal conditions for skilled workers, who came to Italy and to Etruria from regions of the eastern Mediterranean such as northern Syria and Greece and worked alongside Etruscan craftsmen of the time. These craftsmen had the opportunity to invent and test new techniques and new ideas for their rich Etruscan customers. This was because Etruria had been developing its own way of life and of death.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps we can explain in a similar context the origin of wall paintings in tombs, namely that painting the walls of chamber tombs was in pre-Roman Italy a unique Etruscan funerary art.

The very first wall paintings in Etruria date to the seventh century BCE, and they are concentrated in southern Etruria, where all the most important examples were created. Figure 10.1 shows the locations of most of the cemeteries with tumuli and tombs dating back to the Orientalizing period. Fortunately the tufa walls of the Etruscan chamber tombs permitted the conservation of a good number of these paintings, which at first were painted using a rudimentary technique, namely, painting directly onto the stone walls without any type of plaster.<sup>2</sup> In a few cases a thin layer of clay was applied first; this allowed for better and longer conservation of the colors. Some painted tombs were found and described in the eighteenth century, but far too often their subjects and colors have faded or disappeared completely. In these cases, we are forced to use the documentation of the last century, which consists mostly of either descriptions or, if we are lucky, watercolor reproductions.

A useful aspect of the study of Etruscan tomb painting of the seventh century BCE is offered by funerary architecture (fig. 10.2). 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 sixth century BCE. Geometric and flower motifs as well as human and animal figures decorated important parts of the tomb, such as doors or ceiling beams (Latin *columina*). This practice is true particularly for the tombs at Caere, where twelve of the twenty-six Etruscan tombs from the seventh century BCE are concentrated. Veii, too, played an active role in the origin of Etruscan tomb painting of the first half of the seventh century BCE. Thus, we can identify the birthplace of Etruscan tomb painting in the region of Caere and Veii.<sup>3</sup> In sharp contrast, we have to stress that in Tarquinia, where from the second half of the sixth century BCE onward Etruscan tomb painting was particularly well developed, painted tombs dating to the late seventh century BCE are just two in number.<sup>4</sup>

In Veii two important monuments of early Etruscan wall painting are known, the Tomb of the Roaring Lions (Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti) and the Tomb of the Ducks (Tomba delle Anatre),<sup>5</sup> while in Caere we have the largest concentration in Etruria of Orientalizing tomb paintings (fig. 10.3). One can say that at Caere painted decoration was part of every monumental tomb dating to the seventh century BCE—indicating that Caere was a leading center for wall painting at this time.

The earliest painted tomb at Caere is contained in the Sorbo Tumulus (fig. 10.3: no. 1; fig. 10.2: no. 2),



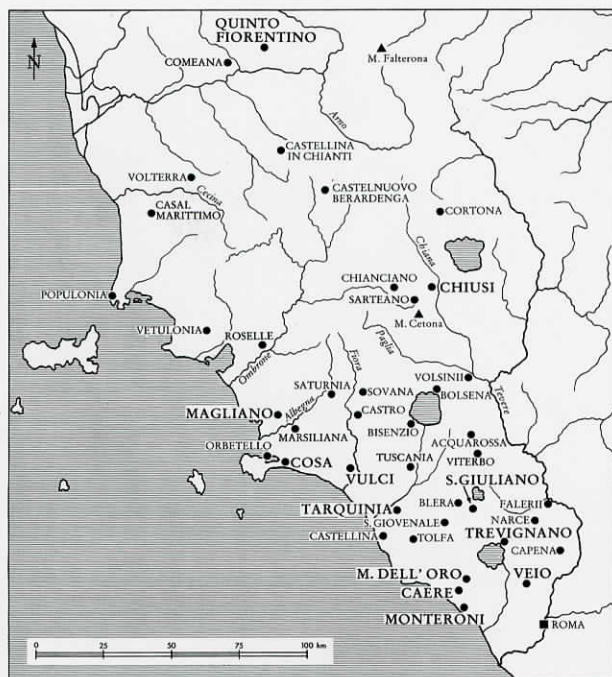


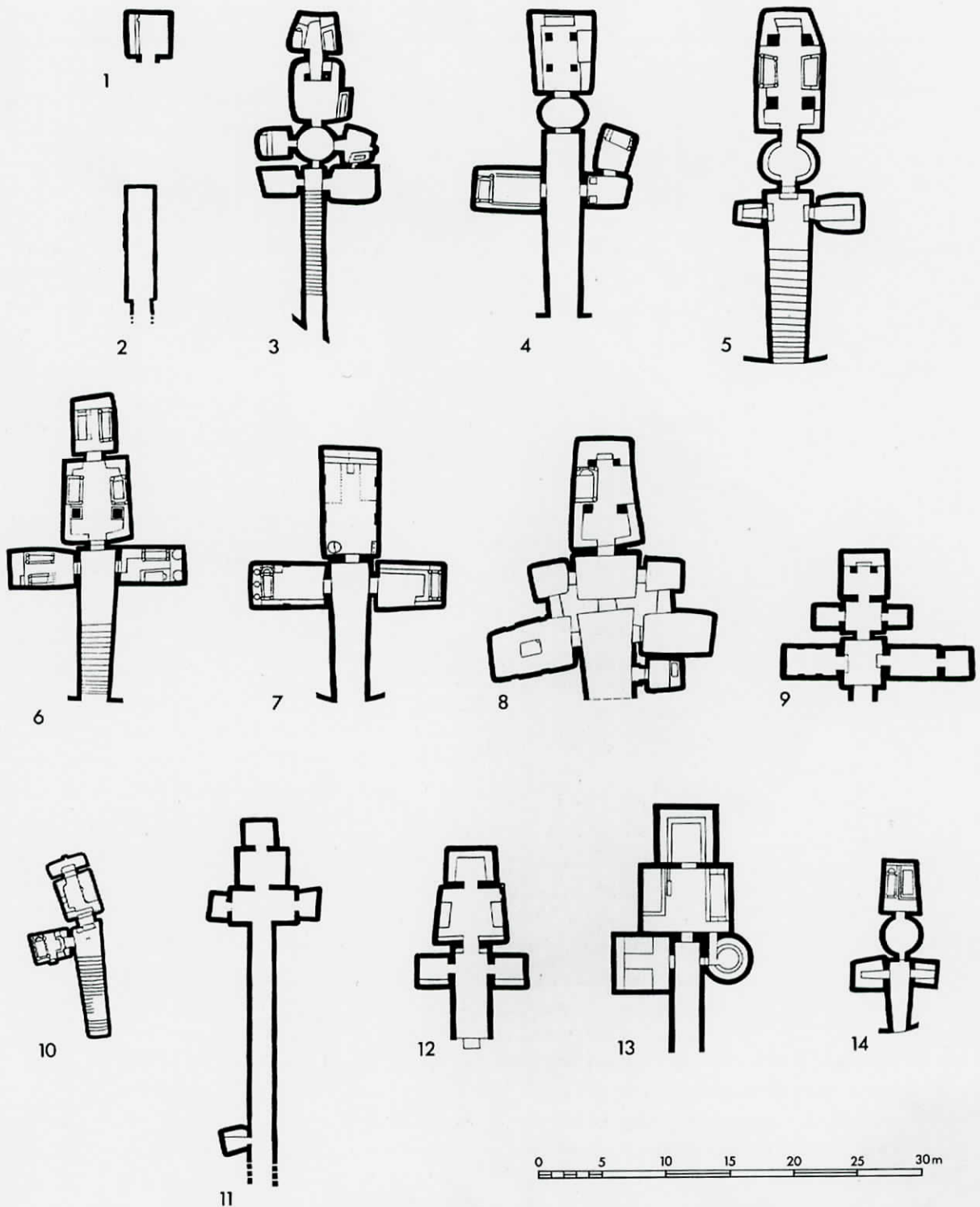
FIGURE 10.1. Distribution of painted tombs in Etruria in the seventh century BCE. The toponyms in larger capital letters indicate the locations of painted examples. Naso 1995: fig. 1.

south of the city area and not far from the Regolini-Galassi Tomb. The tumulus has an irregular plan, because its construction was restricted by earlier structures. These were explored in the eighteenth century and sadly have not survived. We have an idea of the density of this sector of the Sorbo necropolis thanks to the plan published by G. Pinza in 1907.<sup>6</sup> The distribution of the tumuli seems to reveal the existence of a road, which may be responsible for the irregular plan of the tumulus. We should pay particular attention to the presence of tombs that are built completely of tufa blocks, and not dug out of the rock. The use of this expensive building technique was imposed by the nature of the Sorbo area; the Regolini-Galassi and the new tombs explored in the San Paolo area are the best-known examples.<sup>7</sup> The Sorbo Tumulus is the only tumulus in Caere built on a slope completely with tufa blocks; this forced the builders to adjust to different heights. The southern section is higher than the northern. The tumulus is huge; its diameter is more than sixty-two meters across (fig. 10.4), making it one of the largest tumuli at Caere.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately this tumulus is only partially explored, because it was discovered in the late 1960s during the construction of a modern apartment building. Legal disputes halted the excavation, and the tomb was eventually closed off by a modern wall. Before it was closed, archaeologists under the direction of G. Colonna were able to excavate completely the two side chambers, and a small portion of the first chamber. After the first chamber was built, the Etruscan architect planned a second one, as commonly occurred in tomb architecture of Caere. Strangely enough, he encountered an earlier tomb, which forced him to abandon this project.<sup>9</sup> The junction area between the two tombs is now occupied by the elevator of the modern apartment building, resulting in the local name, Tomba dell'Ascensore, or "Tomb of the Elevator." But what is important here is that both tombs have traces of painted decoration.<sup>10</sup>

The first chamber of the later tomb shows some traces of painted decoration that date to around 600 BCE (see pl. 11). The colors are in particularly good condition, probably due to the high humidity and to the fact that the chamber is normally closed. More relevant to our present purposes is the earlier tomb, which displays a corridor with a stylized thatched roof and beam ceiling. Since this tomb is still completely full of earth, it is very difficult to distinguish the painted decoration. Photographs, along with some notes and sketches made during the 1960s excavation, provide evidence for a reconstruction drawing of the decoration of the ceiling beam, i.e., the *columen* (fig. 10.5, left). Like the other elements in this tomb, the *columen* is almost unique. The only painted *columen* that compares is found in a minor tomb at Caere, the Tomb of the Wolf's Teeth (Tomba dei Denti di Lupo; fig. 10.3: no. 8; fig. 10.5, right).<sup>11</sup> The painted motifs on the *columen* in the Sorbo tomb reappear in many other Etruscan Orientalizing 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.<sup>12</sup> The roof of a south Etruscan chamber tomb with similar decoration can also be cited in this instance, namely the Cima Tomb in the necropolis of San Giuliano near Barbarano Romano.<sup>13</sup>

Some material finds help to clarify the chronology of



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).

FIGURE 10.2. Plans of painted tombs in southern Etruria dating to the seventh century BCE. Naso 1995: fig. 2.



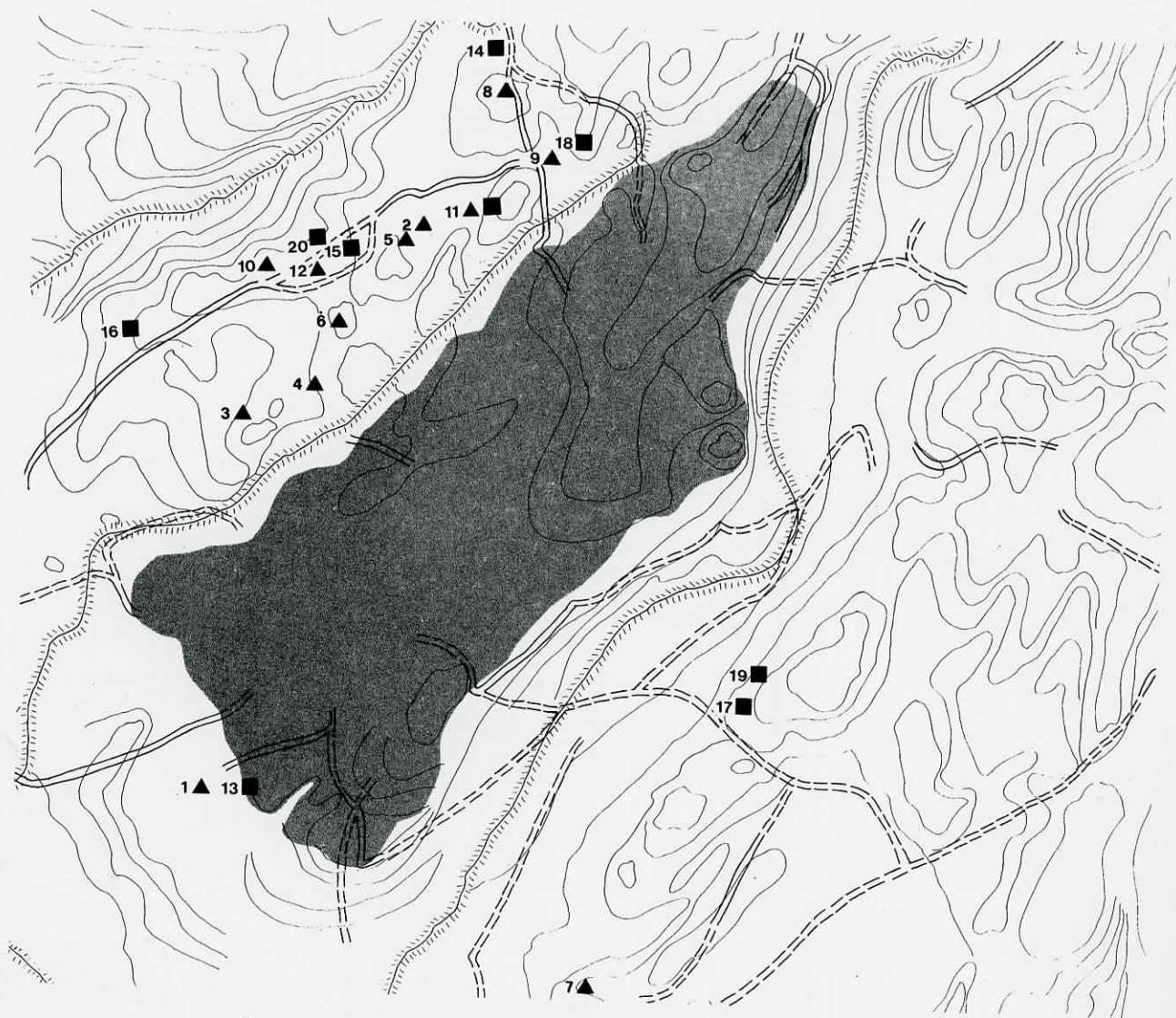


FIGURE 10.3. Locations in Caere of painted tombs dating to the seventh century BCE. Naso 1996: fig. 5.

the two tombs in the Sorbo Tumulus. The older tomb yielded the upper part of an *oinochoe* that can seemingly be assigned to a Cumaean workshop and dated to the first half of the seventh century BCE, probably not after 650 BCE. Such vases are frequently documented in Etruria. At Caere several examples exist, some even with Etruscan inscriptions, like the pair of vases with the inscription *mi qutum karkanās* from an unknown tomb.<sup>14</sup> On the Sorbo vase, particularly fine hooks with painted points decorate the shoulder, in a manner similar to imports from Campania found at Caere. An unusual vase in the British Museum with the same hooks on the shoulder may be assigned to a Caeretan

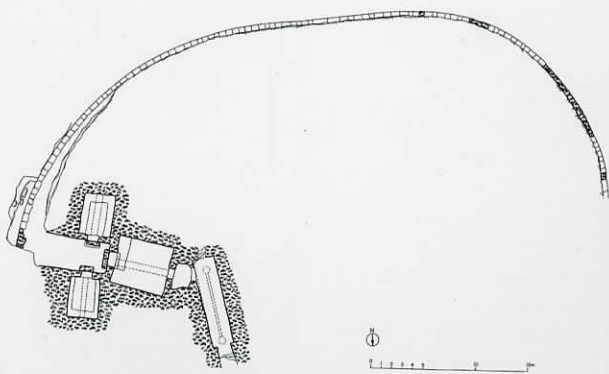


FIGURE 10.4. Plan of the Sorbo Tumulus (Tumulo del Sorbo). Naso 1996: fig. 23.

workshop because of the molded protuberances, which occur also on glass vessels produced in Caere.<sup>15</sup>

Several examples of pottery come from the later tomb, including some Early Corinthian vases dating to around 600 BCE.<sup>16</sup> Although not directly related to our present subject, it is appropriate to mention here two exceptional and still unpublished bucchero vases from the later 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 (fig. 10.6). Metallographic analysis has identified some encrustations preserved on the surface of the vase as

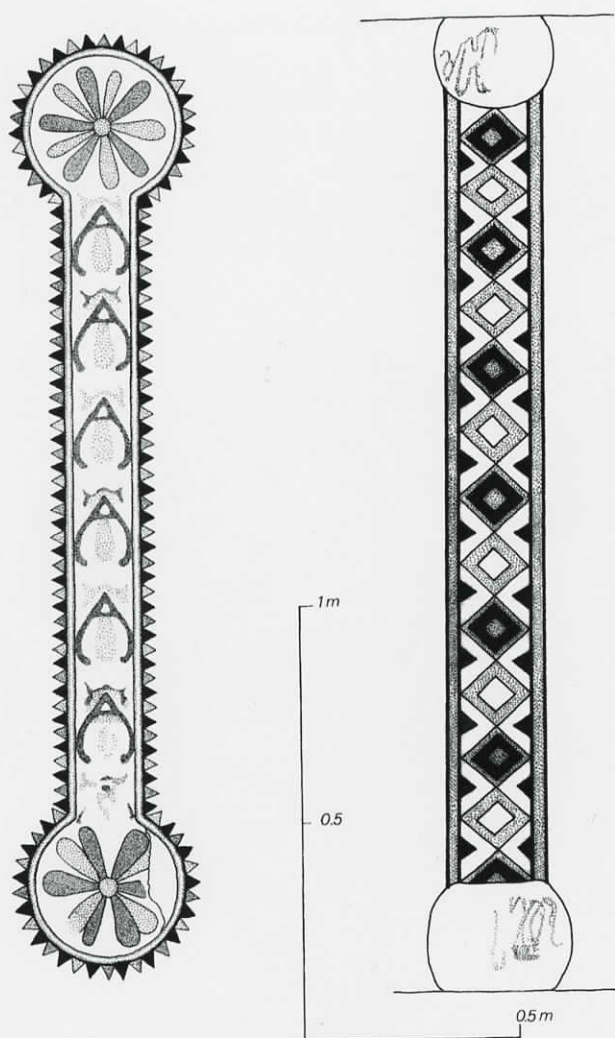


FIGURE 10.5. Painted ceiling beams. Left: earlier tomb of the Sorbo Tumulus (675–650 BCE). Right: Tomb of the Wolf's Teeth (Denti di Lupo) (ca. 630 BCE). Drawings: M. Menzel.

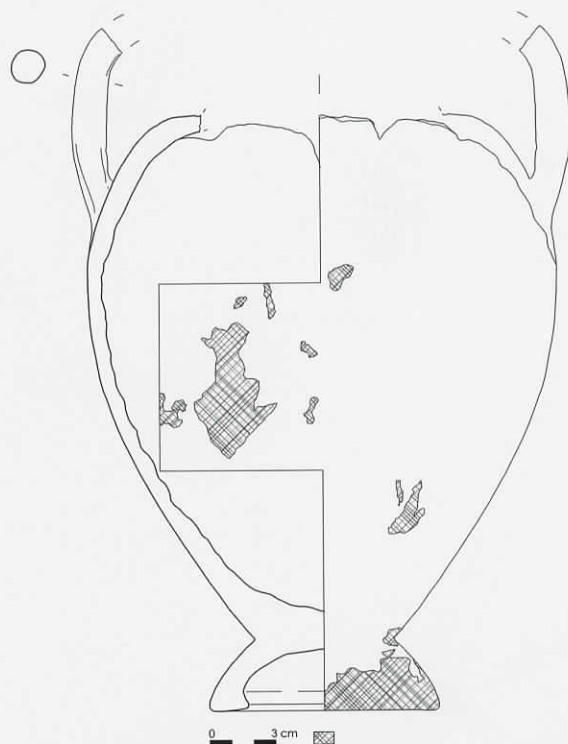


FIGURE 10.6. Bucchero amphora with silver coating. Around 600 BCE. Museum storeroom, Cerveteri. Drawing: A. Babbì; photo: A. Naso.



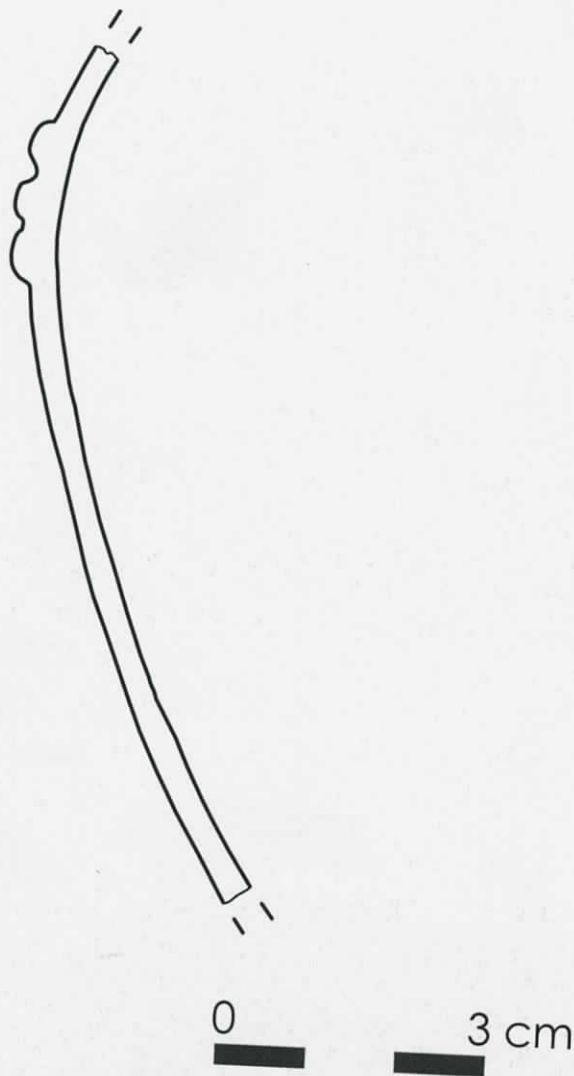


FIGURE 10.7. Profile of bucchero vessel with gold coating.  
Around 600 BCE. Museum storeroom, Cerveteri.  
Drawing: A. Babbi.

pure silver: although silvering decoration on bucchero at Caere is quite common,<sup>17</sup> this real silver coating is unprecedented. The second vase is even more extraordinary: ten sherds belonging to the same object, identifiable as an *oinochoe*, bear the remains of gold coating, sometimes with traces of superimposed incised decoration (see pl. 12; fig. 10.7). Both vases are clearly experimental products, probably relating to the same workshop, which would have been active around 600 BCE in Caere. This practice is not surprising, since bucchero pottery was first developed at Caere in the early seventh century. Scientific analysis has revealed that

bole, a soft, fine clay, was used for fixing the gold coating onto the surface of the vase. These two bucchero vases with metallic coating are still under study;<sup>18</sup> for the moment one can say that such decoration on pottery is documented in Etruria and elsewhere.

To complete the study of the Sorbo Tumulus one has to follow several story lines, including those learned from rumor and hearsay. Many years ago a reliable source reported that he had heard in Cerveteri that some bronze lions' heads were found in the Tomb of the Elevator and then sold. We can imagine lions' heads on bronze cauldrons like the one from the Regolini-Galassi Tomb at Caere. Might one mention a piece in a Swiss private collection, without provenience, acquired after the excavation at Caere (fig. 10.8)?

To sum up the history of the Sorbo Tumulus: A corridor chamber, probably contained in a tumulus, was dug during the first half of the seventh century BCE in the Sorbo cemetery. Around 600 BCE, the tumulus was enlarged by the addition of an exceptional outer curb wall (*krepis*) of tufa blocks. During the construction of this



FIGURE 10.8. Lion protome once belonging to bronze cauldron. Seventh century BCE. After Reusser 1986.

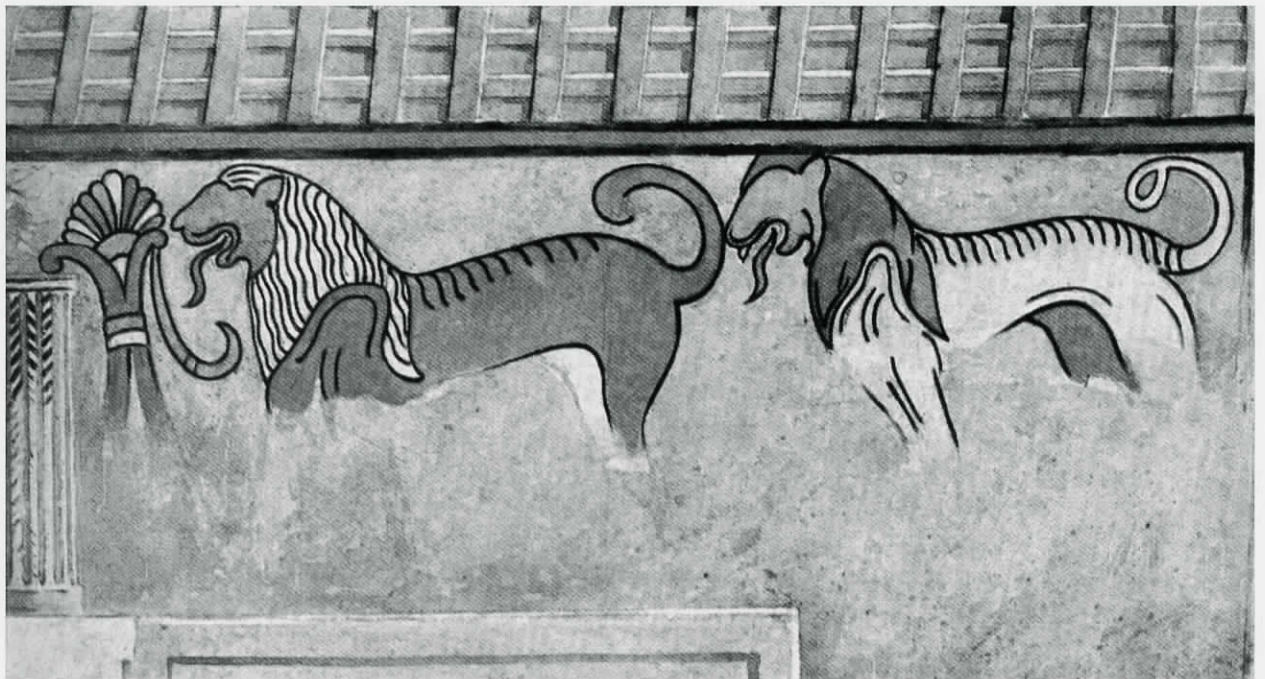
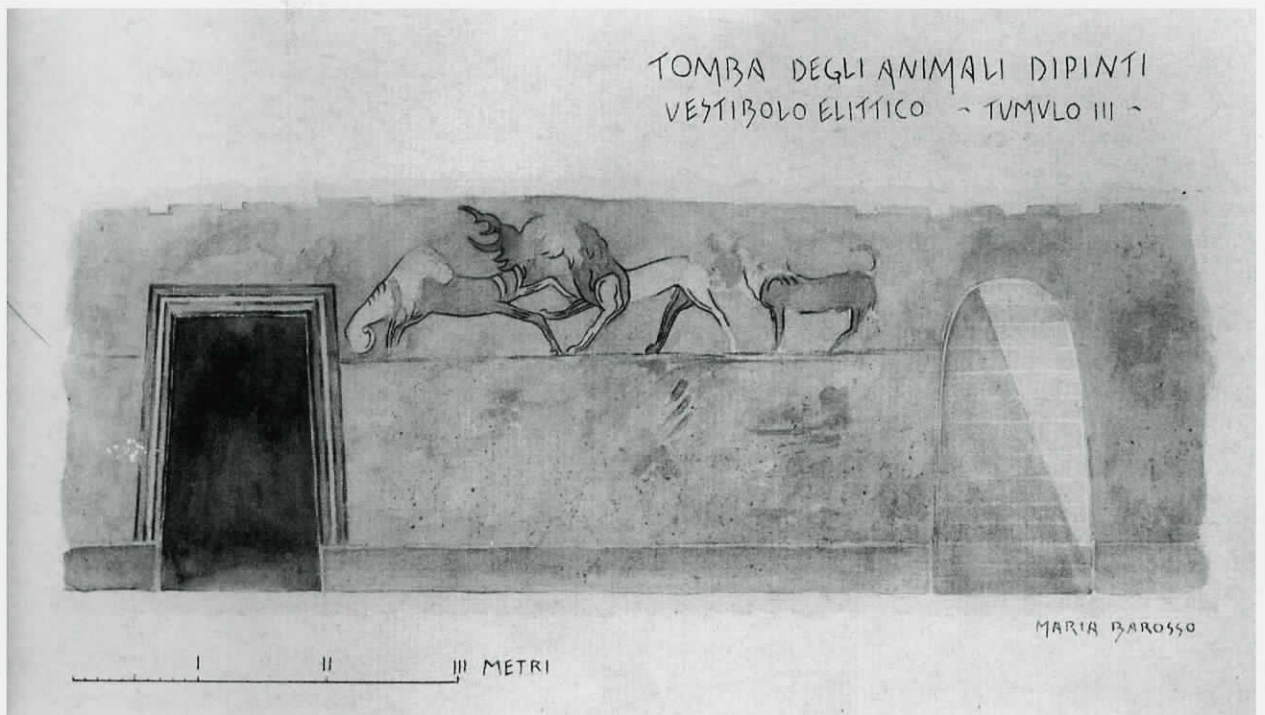


FIGURE 10.9. Watercolors of tomb paintings, by Maria Barosso. (a) Tomb of the Painted Animals (Animali Dipinti). Ca. 650 BCE. After Colonna 1989: pl. 56a. (b) Tomb of the Painted Lions (Leoni Dipinti). After *MonAntLinc* 42 (1955): pl. 2.



tomb, the discovery of an older corridor chamber forced a change in the architectural plan of the new tomb. The monument belonged to an exceptionally rich Etruscan *gens*. Although more could certainly be said under these and other headings about the Sorbo Tumulus (including its excavation in the eighteenth century by Paolo Calabresi),<sup>19</sup> it is appropriate now to provide a brief discussion of other painted chambers at Caere.

The Tomb of the Painted Animals (Tomba degli Animali Dipinti; fig. 10.9a; fig. 10.2: no. 5) and the Tomb of the Painted Lions (Tomba dei Leoni Dipinti; fig. 10.9b; fig. 10.2: no. 6; *see pl. 13*) are noteworthy. They were both decorated by painting directly onto the tufa walls, and the paintings have now almost completely vanished. By contrast, for both tomb paintings from relatively the same time at Veii a thin layer of clay was applied to the wall—a useful feature not only for the painter, who obtained a better spread of the colors, but also for the preservation of the wall paintings. These two Caeretan painted tombs, the Tomb of the Painted Animals and the Tomb of the Painted Lions, date to a time around the middle of the seventh century BCE. It appears that the lions of the two tombs follow the same model, as W. L. Brown noted many years ago.<sup>20</sup>

It is necessary to discuss the origin of the desire to paint the walls of a chamber tomb. It is not completely convincing to say that this idea came to Etruria from the eastern Mediterranean or Greece, as has often been stated.<sup>21</sup> The Middle Italic hut urns of the Iron Age display rich decoration on their outer surfaces, which is clearly indicative of something more than funerary practice. Our knowledge of the domestic 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.<sup>22</sup> The Etruscan elites of the Orientalizing period developed a luxurious personal style in life and death, as exemplified by paintings as well as many other artistic works, including textiles.<sup>23</sup> The latter, and their reproductions, may well turn out to be a very important resource, as there is much still to be explored. Finally, our knowledge of early Etruscan wall painting can only be enhanced by future excavation not only of cemeteries but also of the cities, as we are reminded by Pliny the Elder when he writes, [*picturae*] *durant et Caere antiquiores et ipsae*

(*Natural History* 35.18), “At Caere there survive paintings still more ancient.”

## NOTES

1. Naso 2007.
2. A synthesis of the technique of Etruscan tomb painting has recently been provided by Vlad Borrelli (2003).
3. I have stressed the importance of architecture in the study of Orientalizing tomb painting in Naso 1995, in which the bibliography for each painted tomb known up to 1994 can be found.
4. The painted tombs at Tarquinia consist of the Tomb of the Panthers (Tomba delle Pantere; Brocato 2009) and the Tomba Avvolta (Naso 1996:405 and 421).
5. For the Tomb of the Roaring Lions see Boitani 2007 and Boitani 2010; for further suggestions see Naso 2008 and Naso 2010. The Tomb of the Ducks has been recently examined by Brocato (2012). On early Etruscan vase painting in Veii see Szilágyi 2006.
6. Pinza 1907; Pinza 1915: pl. 10; Cascianelli (2003:18–27, figs. 11–14) comments on this.
7. See Sannibale 2008, with previous literature, on the Regolini-Galassi Tomb. For the new tombs near the San Paolo area at Cerveteri, see Rizzo 2005 and Rizzo 2008.
8. Naso 2003:13–23 (for architecture and paintings); Naso 2005 (ceramics and history of the excavation).
9. A similar situation is documented at Caere, in the Tomb of the Painted Lions within the Tumulus of the Shields and Chairs (Tumulo degli Scudi e delle Sedie); Naso 1995:479–481, fig. 16.
10. In October 1994, when I was working at Caere on the excavation of the Etruscan city directed by the late M. Cristofani, I persistently asked Maria Antonietta Rizzo (at the time responsible for the Cerveteri area for the Soprintendenza Archeologica dell’Etruria Meridionale) about the Tomb of the Elevator. Finally, she decided to open it again for a few days to check the preservation of the paintings; 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 fared better. A modern wall, removed in October 1994, was inserted at the end of the corridor, at ca. 3 meters the widest in the tomb architecture of Caere.
11. The presence of some painted animals was noted on the roof of the older tomb in the Sorbo Tumulo, 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 due to the bad condition of the paintings).
11. For the Tomb of the Wolf’s Teeth see Naso 1991.



12. Naso 1996:343–344 (rose ornaments); Naso 2003:19 (Phoenician palmettes).
13. Naso 2003:27–34 with previous literature.
14. For both vases (Paris, Louvre, inv. nos. D 70, D 71) and the inscriptions (*TLE* 63; *ET* 2.18–19) see Gran Aymerich and Briquel 1991.
15. Williams 1986:298, fig. 21 for the vase in the British Museum (inv. no. GR 1965.02-22.1), dated to 675–650 BCE; Leach 1987:127, table I (“hooks”); Martelli 1994 for the glass vases.
16. Naso 2005:194–195, pl. 1b and 2b for the Corinthian vases.
17. See Rasmussen, chapter 15 of this volume.
18. I plan to publish this material together with Dr. G. Guida (Istituto Centrale del Restauro, Rome), who carried out the analysis.
19. Naso 2005:197–199.
20. Brown 1960:39–40. M. Martelli suggested that these tomb paintings could be attributed to the vase painter known as the Painter of the Birth of Menerva (Pittore della Nascita di Menerva), but her proposal has not been commented on in the literature (Martelli 1987:20, 266–267, n. 43).
21. For instance Giuliano (2005:70, n. 8) presumes a Euboian origin for the painter of the Tomb of the Ducks.
22. A similar view has been expressed by Leighton (2005).
23. The evidence for Etruscan textiles has been assembled by Gleba (2008).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boitani, F. 2007. “Véies: La tombe des Lions Rugissant.” *Les Dossiers d’Archéologie* 322:30–33.
- . 2010. “Veio, la Tomba dei Leoni Ruggenti: Dati preliminari.” In *Archeologia nella Tuscia. Atti dell’incontro di studio, Viterbo, 2.3.2007*, ed. P. A. Gianfrotta and A. M. Moretti, 23–47. Viterbo.
- Brocato, P. 2009. “La Tomba delle Pantere di Tarquinia.” *Ostraka* 18:119–39.
- . 2012. *La Tomba delle Anatre di Veio*. Cosenza.
- Brown, W. L. 1960. *The Etruscan Lion*. Oxford.
- Colonna, G. 1989. “Gli Etruschi e ‘l’invenzione’ della pittura.” In *Pittura etrusca al Museo di Villa Giulia* (catalogue of exhibition), ed. M. A. Rizzo, 19–25. Rome.
- Giuliano, A. 2005. “Protoattici in Occidente.” In *Aei mnestos. Miscellanea di studi per Mauro Cristofani*, ed. B. Adembri, 64–72. Florence.
- Gleba, M. 2008. *Textile Production in Pre-Roman Italy*. Oxford.
- Gran-Aymerich, J. M. J., and D. Briquel. 1991. “Appendice.” In Naso 1991:111–126.
- Leach, S. S. 1987. *Subgeometric Pottery from Southern Etruria*. Gothenburg.
- Leighton, R. 2005. “House Urns and Etruscan Tomb Painting: Tradition versus Innovation in the Ninth–Seventh Centuries BC.” *OJA* 24:363–380.
- Martelli, M. 1994. “Sulla produzione di vetri orientalizzanti.” In *Tyrrhenoi philotechnoi*, ed. M. Martelli, 75–97. Pisa and Rome.
- Naso, A. 1991. *La Tomba dei Denti di Lupo a Cerveteri*. Florence.
- . 1995 [1990]. “All’origine della pittura etrusca: Decorazione parietale e architettura funeraria in Etruria meridionale nel VII sec. a.C.” *JRGZM* 37.2:439–499.
- . 1996. *Architetture dipinte: Decorazioni parietali non figurate nelle tombe a camera dell’Etruria meridionale (VII–V sec. a.C.)*. Rome.
- . 2003. “Nuovi dati sulla pittura funeraria di età orientalizzante in Etruria meridionale.” In *Pittura etrusca: Problemi e prospettive*, ed. A. Minetti, 13–35. Siena.
- . 2005. “Il Tumulo del Sorbo a Caere.” In *Dinamiche*, 193–203.
- . 2007. “Etruscan Style of Dying: Funerary Architecture, Tomb Groups, and Social Range at Caere and Its Hinterland during the Seventh–Sixth Centuries BC.” In *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean. International Conference Chicago, 17–18.02.2006*, ed. N. Laneri, 141–163. Chicago.
- . 2010. “The Origin of Tomb Painting in Etruria.” *Ancient West and East* 9:63–86.
- Pinza, G. 1907. “La Tomba Regolini-Galassi e le altre rinvenute al ‘Sorbo’ in territorio di Cerveteri.” *RM* 22:35–186.
- . 1915. *Materiali per la etnologia antica toscano-laziale* 1. Milan.
- Reusser, C. 1986. *Testimonianze di arte etrusca in collezioni private ticinesi*. Lugano.
- Rizzo, M. A. 2005. “Le tombe orientalizzanti di San Paolo a Cerveteri.” In *Dinamiche*, 285–300.
- . 2008. “Le tombe monumentali di San Paolo.” In *Etruschi: Le antiche metropoli del Lazio* (catalogue of exhibition), ed. M. Torelli and A. M. Moretti Sgubini, 219–224. Milan.
- Sannibale, M. 2008. “Gli ori della Tomba Regolini-Galassi: Tra tecnologia e simbolo. Nuove proposte di lettura nel quadro del fenomeno orientalizzante in Etruria.” *MÉFRA* 120.2: 337–367.
- Szilágyi, J. G. 2006. “Dall’Attica a Narce, via Pitecusa.” *Mediterranea* 2:27–55.
- Vlad Borrelli, L. 2003. “Profilo storico della tecnologia della pittura tombale etrusca.” In *Pittura etrusca: Problemi e prospettive*, ed. A. Minetti, 140–153. Siena.
- Williams, D. 1986. “Greek Potters and Their Descendants in Campania and Southern Etruria, c. 720–630 BC.” In *Italian Iron Age Artefacts in the British Museum. Papers of the Sixth British Museum Classical Colloquium*, ed. J. Swaddling, 295–304. London.