Iconography and iconology : Nineteenth to Twenty-first centuries

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Introduction
Reflecting on the different ways figure-decorated representations on Etruscan artifacts have been interpreted, one has to look back to the early period of scholarship when those images were discovered in considerable number and their meanings were first thoroughly discussed – that is, back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. At that time, the discovery of a vast number of painted vases in the necropolis of Vulci and the unprecedented evidence of wall paintings in the Monterozzi cemetery in Tarquinia-Corneto added a lot of new evidence to the already considerable number of relief urns and engraved mirrors, and antiquarians had to invent and elaborate original methods to classify and explain those items.

The different approaches to the figure-decorated material of the last fifty years,[1] such as Erwin Panofsky's opposition between iconography and iconology, or the anthropological study of the "cité des images" developed in the "École de Paris" around Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, have not superseded some of the positions that were taken in the early nineteenth century. From that time through the most recent publications, we can observe three distinct interpretations of the Etruscan images. First, they represent the happy or terrifying life the dead can expect after the funerary rituals are completed; second, they symbolize the aristocratic life they led and, like the *symposion* sets deposited in the grave, define the social status of the dead; and third, they reproduce the rituals conducted during the funerals, as a testimony of their correct observance. The funerary orientation of some of these interpretations is explained by the archaeological provenance of most of the Etruscan images: they were produced for the grave or deposited in it.[2]

Another recurrent statement by archaeologists and art historians over the last two centuries is the importance of the debt owed by Etruscan art to Greek artifacts and artists in every period. This influence is taken into account by scholars when dealing both with the formal components of the figure-decorated scene and with its meanings. It therefore seems necessary not to separate the study of the iconography from various questions concerning the date, artist, place of production, and external formal influences displayed by the image.

The following chronological survey of nineteenth- to twenty-first-century scholarship on Etruscan figure-decorated representations focuses on two monuments—the Tomb of Inscriptions in Tarquinia (510 BCE; Figure 1) and the calyx-krater from Vulci in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris (330–300 BCE; Figure 2)—both discovered around 1830 and discussed throughout this period by numerous scholars.[3]

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[1] Summary of Etruscan wall-painting scholarship in Arias 1989, followed up for the next decade by Rouveret 2000–2001.

[2] For a recent presentation of the non-funerary orientation of the Etruscan iconography on vase painting, see Bonaudo 1999.

[3] See the web site *Iconographie et Archéologie pour l'Italie préromaine* (ICAR): http://icar.huma-num.fr/icardb/support.php?idsupport=TARQ69 and Martelli (ed.) 1987, 327.

1. The establishment of research methods in the second quarter of the nineteenth century: Corpora and series

An appropriate starting point is the Latin maxim of Eduard Gerhard, published in his famous *Rapporto Volcente*:[4] "Monumentorum artis, qui unum uidit nullum uidit, qui milia uidit, unum uidit" [Concerning monuments of art, who has seen one has seen none; who has seen a thousand has seen one]. This sentence states the "corpus" principle and explains the method of analyzing images by arranging them in series. Two of these nineteenth-century corpora are that of engraved mirrors, started by Gerhard—who abandoned the previous identification as mystic plates[5]—and that of Hellenistic figure-decorated urns, also conceived by Gerhard but carried out by Heinrich von Brunn (1870) and then Gustav Körte (1890–96), who assembled an extensive series of items, almost all decorated with mythological scenes.[6] The other two important corpora of Etruscan artifacts are of wall paintings and figure-decorated vases, both of which were in progress for many years (see below).

Concerning the figure-decorated vases, the first question to be solved at that time was their place of production. They represented a major field of antiquarian study because they were the main documents other than Greek and Latin texts from which to learn of myths and ancient practices. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, all such vases—kept on library shelves above the books—were considered Etruscan, because they were discovered in the necropolises of Etruria, part of the phenomenon known as "Etruscomania." By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, most of the painted vases discovered in Etruscan graves had been properly identified as Greek in origin, thus depriving Etruscan archaeology of a major field of study. This took place in the antiquarian sphere and soon received general acceptance. By 1850, very few vases were still credited to Etruscan workmanship. All that were left as Etruscan were bucchero, Etrusco-Corinthian ware, and red-figure vases. Not until 1947 did John D. Beazley publish the first corpus of Etruscan vase-painting.[7]

By what criteria, then, were Etruscan figure-decorated vases analyzed at that time? The calyx-krater of the Cabinet des Médailles was discovered in 1833 (quickly entering the Baron Beugnot's collection) and published, one year later, by Desiré Raoul-Rochette, claiming to write the first real study of Etruscan painted vases.[8] Etruscan features were first sought in the inscriptions that were integrated into the scenes and then in the style and the subject depicted. According to the author, the scene, representing Ajax slaughtering a Trojan prisoner, was typical of the taste for cruelty, bloodshed, and pain that Etruscans appreciated. To identify the subject on the other side of the krater—Charun greeting three dead women—the scholar compares other Etruscan art as well as ancient texts: he clearly identifies Charun as the Etruscan demon of death, citing urns from Volterra; but for the woman on the right, identified as the Amazon Penthesilea by an inscription, he finds no text in ancient literature to explain the scene, which puzzles him greatly. This systematic reference to a text in order to interpret the image is another way of analyzing figure-decorated objects that would last long in scholarship.

As for wall painting from the necropolises of Etruria, the scholars of this period saw it as important evidence because there was no doubt as to its place of production (the paintings that cover the walls of the tombs were made on the spot) and it explained the beginnings of Etruscan art, its imitation of Greek art, and gave some idea of the appearance of lost Greek painting that is known only from the textual tradition. The first scientific edition did not begin until 1937, with the collection *Monumenti della pittura antica scoperti in Italia: Pittura etrusca,*

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[4] Gerhard 1831, p. 111. Gerhard founded the German archaeological association the *Hyperboreans*, which become, with the addition of foreign antiquarians, the *Instituto di Corrispondenza archeologica.*

[5] Gerhard 1843–67.

[6] Brunn and Körte 1870–96.

[7] Beazley 1947, to be completed by the *CVA*.

[8] Raoul-Rochette 1834.

complete catalogues appearing only after 1980.[9] But as soon as they were discovered, the paintings were copied, as were mirrors and urns, given the additional problem that as soon as they were exposed, they quickly deteriorated.

The Tomb of Inscriptions in Tarquinia was discovered in 1827 by August Kestner, Otto Magnus von Stackelberg, and Joseph Thürmer, who immediately took charge of copying the paintings. Kestner published the monument almost immediately, interpreting the tomb as Etruscan work because of the rudeness of the forms, whereas the scenes depict rituals: the parade of horsemen and the pugilists represent the funerary games; the dancers, a procession for Dionysus.[10] This *realistic* thesis is explicitly opposed to a previous publication by Raoul-Rochette upholding an *eschatological* interpretation: the scenes illustrate the happy life in the hereafter gained by the deceased, who are depicted in the dance of wine, thanks to an initiation to Dionysus.[11]

This first period established the principal methods of research: constructing corpora of the artifacts, arranging them in series to understand their meaning (realistic or eschatological perspectives), taking into account their inscriptions, comparing them with ancient texts, and emphasizing Greek influence.

2. Exegesis from the later nineteenth century to 1930
The first works of synthesis on the meanings of Etruscan figural scenes developed in the second period and involved intense scholarly debate.[12] The widely read book by the French historian Jules Martha was published in 1889,[13] in which he set down the main theories of the significations of tomb paintings. Martha distinguished two periods: before the third century BCE, most of the scenes realistically depict the funeral ceremonies performed in honor of the deceased; they are represented in the tomb to attest to the piety of the dead's family and to grant him eternal happiness. From the third century on, the figure-decorated scenes take place in the underworld: the migration of souls, demons, and the deceased depicted as a hero justify this second eschatological approach.

Thus Martha links the Tomb of Inscriptions—belonging to the first period—to the iconography of funeral ceremonies: it depicts a horse race won by one horseman. The two sides of the calyx-krater, with the demon of death, would then relate to the second period: the women are depicted in the hereafter and the slaughter of the prisoner refers to a tragic death, in the presence of Charun waiting to ferry the soul.

Martha's interpretation very clearly set the terms of what was to become a dispute between the realistic and the eschatological readings, since scholars would soon be interpreting the scenes in funerary iconography of all periods as depicting the next world. This is the case of Fritz Weege,[14] who states that tomb paintings represent the world of the dead from the Archaic period until the end of Etruscan culture. The only change concerns the tone of the scenes: beginning in the fourth century, the world of the hereafter is depicted as terrifying and dark, featuring dreadful demons like Charun, whereas it is filled with happiness in the Archaic period. This change was due to religious influence, Orphic and Pythagorean, coming from Magna Graecia.

Shortly after its publication, the book was sharply criticized by two scholars: the Dane Fredrick Poulsen upheld the realistic reading whereas the Dutch scholar Carel Claudius van

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[9] Steingräber 1984. See also a digital catalogue on the web: *ICAR, une base de données des scènes figurées de l'Italie pré-romaine*: http://icar.huma-num.fr/, directed by N. Lubtchansky.
[10] Kestner 1829.
[11] Raoul-Rochette 1828.
[12] See also Arias 1989.
[13] Martha 1889.
[14] Weege 1921.

Essen stated that the violent elements of the iconography from the fourth century had nothing to do with Orphism:[15] at that very moment, the Etruscans freed themselves from Greek culture, permitting a new language to arise.

3. Mapping the workshops of Etruscan artifacts (1930–1960)

After the period of debate over the meaning of funerary iconography, the next three decades were marked by studies that probed the formal aspects of image. Inheriting the German approach of corpora and developing connoisseurship of vases, Beazley undertook the first complete classification of Etruscan figure-decorated vases, identifying the artists or workshops of more than a thousand items.[16] At the same time, several scholars treated wall paintings the same way: Luisa Banti, Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, Giovannangelo Camporeale, Pericle Ducati, Franz Messerschmidt, and Massimo Pallottino worked on the classification of the paintings, in order to map and date their production.[17] Their creation was said to begin on the coastal cities (Tarquinia) and then develop in inland Etruria (Chiusi). They also emphasized Greek influence on the Etruscan workshops: Corinthian, Laconian, Ionian, and lastly Attic.

Other corpora were studied as well: the relief stone monuments from Archaic Chiusi (urns, *cippi*), were gathered by Enrico Paribeni in the late 1930s,[18] the figure-decorated stelae from Felsina in the Po valley[19] and the Pontic vases (1932),[20] by Ducati, to mention the main works that looked at workshop and formal aspects.

Thus, the style of the paintings of the Tomb of Inscriptions is related to the emigration of Ionian artists to Etruria, the workshop having also produced the Tombs of the Bacchants, the Dead Man, the Painted Vases, and the Old Man, according to Pallottino[21].

As for the calyx-krater, Beazley attributes it to a period of decadence of vase painting, because of its coarse style. But against other scholars Beazley is ready to defend the quality of Etruscan art, and especially of violent scenes like the slaughter of the Trojan prisoner on the krater, a scene which actually comes from Greece and emphasizes the "heroic strain of the Etruscan character."[22] In analyzing the pattern of Ajax and the Trojan, Beazley compares it to several other monuments showing the same composition, but with Achilles, and proposes a Greek model. In the krater, the addition of Charun is an adaptation to the Etruscan beliefs; the different attitude of the victim is a variation from the Greek model; and the inscription indicating Ajax (*Aivas*) is a slip for *Achle* (Achilles). So again what is important here is to set down the dependence or originality of Etruscan forms with respect to the Greek forms.

Finally, by the end of the period, worldwide interest was excited by Erika Simon and Roland Hampe's book on the question of Greek models, but interrogating the iconography. Examining the meaning of scenes on vases and bronze artifacts of the Archaic period, they reveal the Etruscans' deep knowledge of Greek mythology.[23]

4. New approaches to the meanings of images in the 1970–1980s: Social

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[15] Poulsen 1922; Van Essen 1927.

[16] Beazley 1947.

[17] Banti 1955–56; Bianchi Bandinelli 1939; Camporeale 1968; Ducati 1937; Messerschmidt 1926; and Pallottino 1952.

[18] Paribeni 1938; Paribeni1939; supplemented by Jannot 1984.

[19] Ducati 1911. For studies of the iconography, see the review of the literature by Sassatelli and Govi 2007.

[20] Ducati 1932; supplemented by Hannestad 1974. On black-figure workshops, see also Gaultier 1995 and Spivey 1987.

[21] Pallottino 1952.

[22] Beazley 1947, 8.

[23] Hampe and Simon 1964. For reaction to this thesis, see Camporeale 1969a. See also Simon 1973 for wall-paintings.

background, semiotics, and genealogy

In the late 1970s, several authors borrowed a methodology of analyzing images from archaeological studies, specifically concerning funeral data. The social reading of grave furnishings is associated with the anthropological concept of acculturation, another way to speak of influence, removing the problematic hierarchy between source culture (Greeks) and target culture (Etruscans). [24] This sociological approach is well represented by Mauro Cristofani, who shows how the funeral is a crucial moment in social life.[25] We can recognize in that moment a display of the social status of the deceased person, who has deployed very thoughtful strategies, including the production of images.

Another archaeologist, Bruno d'Agostino, has certainly taken this social reading of funerary figural representations the furthest.[26] The social reading is to take wall painting or engraved monuments included in the tombs as showing emblematic scenes of the life of the Etruscan lord, since the images remain a privilege of the aristocratic class. Those scenes are specifically designed to embody his social status. In the Tomb of Inscriptions, the *komos* (wine dance), and the *symposion* (wine consumption), are part of the worthiest activities and characterize, according to d'Agostino, the social and familial dignity of the deceased lord.[27] We may also emphasize that different age classes are embodied by different activities: the horsemen in the left corner of the chamber represent the young men, the dancers with wine vases on the right, the adults.[28] Thus in this interpretation, d'Agostino denies the realistic and "magico-religious" readings that recognize in Archaic-period scenes the different moments of the funerary rites or the future life in the underworld.[29]

In addition to this sociological view of images, d'Agostino has emphasized how French and Swiss scholars, such as Alain Schnapp, François Lissarrague, or Claude Bérard, have studied figure-decorated scenes using linguistic and semiotic principles.[30] At the same time the "cité des images" was constructed for the figure-decorated vases produced in Athens, d'Agostino and, following him, Luca Cerchiai try to understand the language of Etruscan images by constructing series. [31] For the Tomb of Inscriptions, d'Agostino tackles the interpretation of the doors that are painted in the middle of each wall in the tomb and are a common feature of funerary wall paintings.[32] Between the two traditional explanations – the doors represent the possibility of enlarging the tomb with further chambers that had not yet been dug, or they symbolize death and the underworld[33] – d'Agostino prefers the latter but adds the idea that they represent the deceased *ex absentia*: borrowing the notion of code-switching from the linguistic field, he sets an equivalence between the closed doors surrounded by various characters (dancers, musicians, pugilists, mourners) in different tombs, and the enormous krater in the Tomb of Lionesses flanked by the *aulos* and the lyre players. Like the doors, this vase represents the deceased *ex absentia*.

Lastly, the sociological and semiotic approaches go together with a renewal of the thesis that the Etruscans were very familiar with Greek culture, as Simon and Hampe stated. Recently,

[24] For the Etruscans, Cristofani 1976. For a more methodological approach, Rouveret and Gruzinski 1976.
[25] Cristofani 1978b.
[26] The studies date from 1980s. They are reprinted in D'Agostino and Cerchiai 1999.
[27] D'Agostino and Cerchiai 1999, 13-30
[28] Lubtchansky 2005. For the same analysis of the iconography of women: Lubtchansky 2006.
[29] D'Agostino and Cerchiai 1999, 32 (but corrigendum, xxiii). But Cerchiai, who is close to d'Agostino in this social reading of the images, also studies some scenes that already in the Archaic period depict the underworld: Cerchiai 2008a.
[30] For a methodological example of this line of study: Bérard 1983. This approach has been first used by Angela Pontrandolfo and Agnès Rouveret for Paestan paintings: Greco Pontrandolfo and Rouveret 1982.
[31] Cerchiai applies the same view to Felsinian stelae. See the discussion in Cerchiai 2012 and Sassatelli and Govi 2007. For Caeretan *hydriai*, see Bonaudo 1999.
[32] D'Agostino and Cerchiai 1999, 13–30.
[33] On the interpretation of doors: Naso 1996, 420.

d'Agostino and Cerchiai have thus provocatively stated that "Etruria was a province of Greek culture."[34] A good example is the case of the Greek *symposion*: although with some differences, it is borrowed by the Etruscan aristocracy in its more specific details, as comparison between Etruscan images and Greek epics shows.[35]

As for mythological scenes, scholars also insist on the genealogical interpretation of the myths illustrated. The characters depicted in the figure-decorated representations are connected with a discourse developed by the client claiming the Greek heroes as his ancestors.[36] Thus, the calyx-krater in Paris, with the slaughter of the Trojan prisoner, is interpreted genealogically:[37] the presence of Ajax instead of Achilles is no longer considered a mistake, as Beazley claimed, but a choice of the purchaser of the vase who ordered for his tomb a special scene placing himself in the lineage of the Greek hero Ajax.

This is confirmed by study of the inscriptions (an earlier inscription *Achle* has been found underneath *Aivas*) and comparison of the bearded Ajax with the other examples of this scene that always present Achilles as beardless.[38]

5. On rituals and beliefs in the 1990s and 2000s

The previous period of scholarship ended with a disruptive discovery: the Tomb of the Blue Demons in Tarquinia, a discovery that was to bring about a return to the earlier studies of the religious aspects of iconography after the period of sociological discourse.[39]

The tomb was discovered in 1985. Dated to 440 BCE, it seems to be the first painted tomb that represents the demons of the underworld in a realistic manner: blue skin, red hair, and bloody mouth. The scenes are arranged to be viewed in order, from the front entrance of the tomb to the back. The scene with the demons is on the right-hand wall, and Francesco Roncalli has convincingly argued that it represents the passage of the deceased woman from right to left, across the rocks inhabited by the blue demons, toward the boat, where the boatman waits to conduct her to the world of happiness that she has been granted.[40]

Mauro Cristofani sets the monument in a moment of transition between two periods.[41] First, before the middle of the fifth century, there is no representation of the underworld: instead there are either excerpts from the rituals, or scenes symbolizing the social status of the deceased. The second period is marked by the irruption of a realistic depiction of the underworld with its inhabitants, its demons, and a black cloud surrounding the scene: a suggestion not far from what was already understood by Martha.

This discovery has brought about in recent years a common line of research oriented toward the religious content of the images.[42] Beliefs and dogma on the one hand, rituals on the other, are taken into account by scholars who have produced innovative readings. These new statements connect the images to ancient texts and to the architecture of the tomb (in the case of tomb paintings).

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[34] D'Agostino and Cerchiai 1999, XIX.

[35] Cerchiai and D'Agostino 2004.

[36] Among more recent publications: for urns, van der Meer 2004; for mirrors, de Angelis 2002; for engraved scarabs, Krauskopf 1999.

[37] Maggiani 1985, 208–12. This iconographic trend is to be connected to a major expansion of genealogical legends that developed in various Etruscan sites of the Classical and Hellenistic periods concerning the offspring of various Greek heroes in Italy. See Briquel 1984.

[38] Martelli (ed.) 1987, 327.

[39] ICAR : http://icar.huma-num.fr/icar/support.php?idsupport=TARQ17.

[40] Roncalli 1997. See also Rouveret 2000-2001.

[41] Cristofani 1989.

[42] See Rouveret 2000-2001 and Lubtchansky 2014.

Concerning religious dogma, Roncalli refers to the literary tradition, unfortunately very late,[43] of the Etruscan practice of divinizing sacrifices that render the deceased equal to the gods by offering the blood of certain animals to certain deities. The architectural feature known as the console, which appeared, in the Archaic period, at the center of the pediment between fighting animals, recalls the shape of altars for sacrifice, the hunting of animals evoking the blood shed during sacrifice.

In the Tomb of Inscriptions, this specific "altar-console" is missing, but the tails of the two symmetrical lions, where the console would be in the middle of the pediment of the back wall, recall the volutes that adorn the console in other archaic tombs of Tarquinia.

Other contributions have studied the journey of the deceased to the underworld, a topic that had been forsaken since the social reading of images was undertaken. The argument concerns vases and funerary monuments of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, a point that doesn't give rise to discussion,[44] whereas for the Archaic period, the iconography remains ambiguous and the point is still at issue.[45] Those religious inquiries also stress the funerary role of deities, such as Dionysus, the Dioscuri, Hermes-Turms, and Orpheus, whose cult, according to some scholars, can already be discerned in images of the Archaic period.[46]

As for rituals, on the other hand, scholars have emphasized the location of the images inside the tomb. Their location bears a precise signification. According to Agnès Rouveret, the decorative system of the tomb painting (trees, tents, doors) corresponds to a practice, well known among the Etruscans, of cutting out and marking off some areas as sacred spaces.[47] Arranging the tombs in a series, the author underlines the division into two groups of tombs in the Archaic period. In the first, the trees are combined with doors to adorn scenes of games, whereas in the second, the tents shelter banquet scenes. The Tomb of Inscriptions belongs to the first group: we see three false doors associated with the various games. This must thus be connected with a ritual organization of the paintings and the space in the tomb.

According to Mario Torelli, the ritual is displayed differently, though again through tomb architecture.[48] What has permitted this new analysis is the discovery of the Tomb of the Blue Demons: there is a progression from the entrance of the tomb to the back wall that corresponds to the journey of the deceased to enter the underworld. Likewise in the Tomb of Inscriptions: the horsemen symbolize the journey toward the underworld. The cavalcade on the left and the procession of dancers in the right rear corner take place by the doors – a symbol of the path to the underworld: they are performed in an ambiguous space, between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The other scenes that happen before the doors in the two side walls are located on earth: games on the left, rewards of the games on the right, and in the entrance wall, funerary rituals of preparing food for the dead.[49]

This emphasis placed on the rituals is not exactly the same as the realistic or mimetic readings that see funerary ceremonies in the tomb paintings; here the images directly participate in the ritual, since they are located in strategic places of the funerary space with respect to the ritual.

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[43] Arnobius and Servius are both of the fourth century CE. See Roncalli 1990, and most recently Camporeale 2009; Warden 2009.

[44] For instance, Rendeli 1996, Bonamici 2005, Sassatelli and Govi 2007.

[45] See Cébeillac-Gervasoni 1989, for the differences of opinion between N. Spivey and J. Heurgon, and more recently Sassatelli and Govi 2007, Cerchiai 2012, for the opposition between L. Cerchiai and G. Sassatelli. See also Serra Ridgway 2006.

[46] In general, see Bonamici 2005. For Dionysus, see Massa-Pairault 1998, Krauskopf 2005 and Cerchiai 2008a; for the Dioscuri, Roncalli 1990, Colonna 1996; for Turms, Bonamici 2005; for Orpheus, Ambrosini 1998.

[47] Rouveret 1988.

[48] Torelli 1997b, 122–51.

[49] See also Lubtchansky 2014.

Fernando Gilotta finds the origin of the expression of this ambiguous time and place of Etruscan funerary iconography in Attic vase paintings,[50] while Torelli tends to root the references to rituals in Etruscan and Italic ground. The inquiry into the meanings of the images is thus connected to their formal study, which again illuminates the links with the Greek world.

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[50] Gilotta 1996.

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Figures

Figure 1 Tarquinia. Copy of Tomb of the Inscriptions. From Moltesen and Weber-Lehmann 1992, fig. 1.

Figure 2 Cabinet des Médailles in Paris. Calyx-krater from Vulci (330–300 BCE). From Monuments Inédits 1834, pl. 9.