

**Etruscan Murals**  
**By Mel Copeland**





# Etruscan Murals

## - A reflection on the moods and beliefs of the Etruscans -

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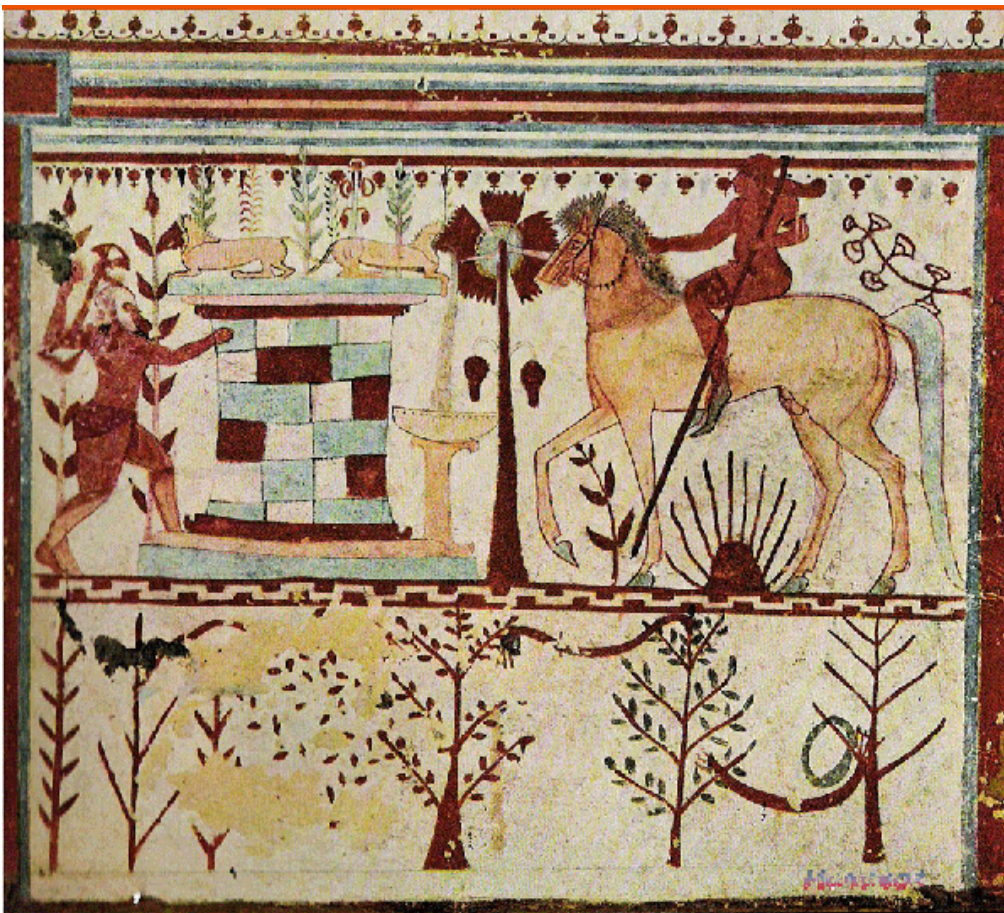
(from [http://www.maravot.com/Etruscan\\_Murals.html](http://www.maravot.com/Etruscan_Murals.html))

05.25.13

By Mel Copeland

Most of these images were made prior to 1950 and thus are an important record of the images originally found in the Etruscan tombs. Many of the images have deteriorated after the tombs were opened. Preservation of their details, particularly those having to do with Etruscan inscriptions, is important. Many of the images are courtesy of the Skira Color Studio publication, "Etruscan Painting," September 13, 1952.

**Close-up of the central mural in the Tomb of the Bulls, Tarquinia, "Achilles in Ambush." Mid 6th Century B.C.** A scene from the Iliad. The Trojan prince, Troilus, upon a stallion, is ambushed by Achilles at the well outside the walls of Troy. Below, are trees representing winter, summer and fall, and



between the trees is a girdle worn around the waist of Etruscan men, frequently appearing in Etruscan scenes. A wreath or garland hangs on the branch of the tree in winter, which may indicate the time of the hero's death. The girdle may be from the [Cestus Girdle of Aphrodite](#). See note 1.

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**Painting of Amazons attacking a Greek, a sarcophagus from Tarquinia** now in the Archeological Museum, Florence, ~5th century B.C.



Painting of Amazons in a quadriga on one of the sides of the sarcophagus from Tarquinia. As described in the Iliad, reflecting late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age warfare, including Celtic, the warrior had a servant-driver who would carry the warrior into various battle positions.



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**Painting of the abduction of Hecuba on a sarcophagus from Tarquinia.** Script AM, referred to as the "Battle of the Amazons," Sarcophagus from Tarquina, Archeological Museum, Florence. This painting obviously involves a woman and warriors, and the text should explain who is involved and what is happening in the scene. The woman does not appear to be wearing armor, and the semi-naked warrior in blue also has no armor, has a Phrygian helmet, and brandishes a sword towards the woman. On the other side of the woman is an armored soldier pointing a spear at the woman. The armed man, carrying a bow on the far right is actually leading the group away. The scene suggests the capture of the woman, not necessarily a battle.

The text: **AM-1 - HVC CRAI: RVI: ASV ATI: TIFI CNEI: LAR RIAL**

Hither is (L. huc) Crai the king (L. rex, regis; It. re, Fr. roi). Aso (Asius, a Trojan ally) of the Ati (sons of Atis). He carries away (L. deveho -veheree -vexi -vectum; Ind. Pres. 3rd Pers. singl. devehit) Cnei (Hecate or Hecuba; Cyneus): the god (L. lar) royal (L. regalis).

Note: Asius was the younger brother of Hecuba and son of Dymas, king of the Phrygian tribe who lived on the Sangarius River (their father was the river god, Sangarius). Asius led that nation's forces in the Trojan War. Crai carries a genitive suffix and may have a relationship to the Titan Crius. Crius was the father of Perses and Perses was the father of Hecate (Hecuba) by Asteria. Rather than calling this scene the "Battle of the Greeks and Amazons" it appears to be "The rape of Hecuba, wife of King Priam of Troy." Trojan stories are favorites in Etruscan art.

Scribal note: A letter faces towards the word it belongs when there is a chance of confusing it with the following word; i.e., HVC CRAI and not HV Ce CRAI. AI is a genitive suffix identifying proper names.



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**Athletes and horseman, Tomb of the Chariots, Tarquinia, ~490 B.C.**



**Athletes and armed dancer, Tomb of the Chariots, Tarquinia, ~490 B.C.**





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Man in flight, Tomb of the Augurs, Tarquinia, ~ 530 B.C.

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**Back wall, Tomb of the Augurs, Tarquinia, scene of two Augurs, with inscription.** Text: TA-1: APA STA PASAR

Translation: the priest (It. abate [m], abbot, priest; Fr. abbé [m], abbot), he stands (L. sto, stare, steti, statum; It. stare; Fr. stationner) to pass (It. passare; Fr. passer)

The left-hand person has an illegible inscription to the right of his head: TA-4: TAN.....

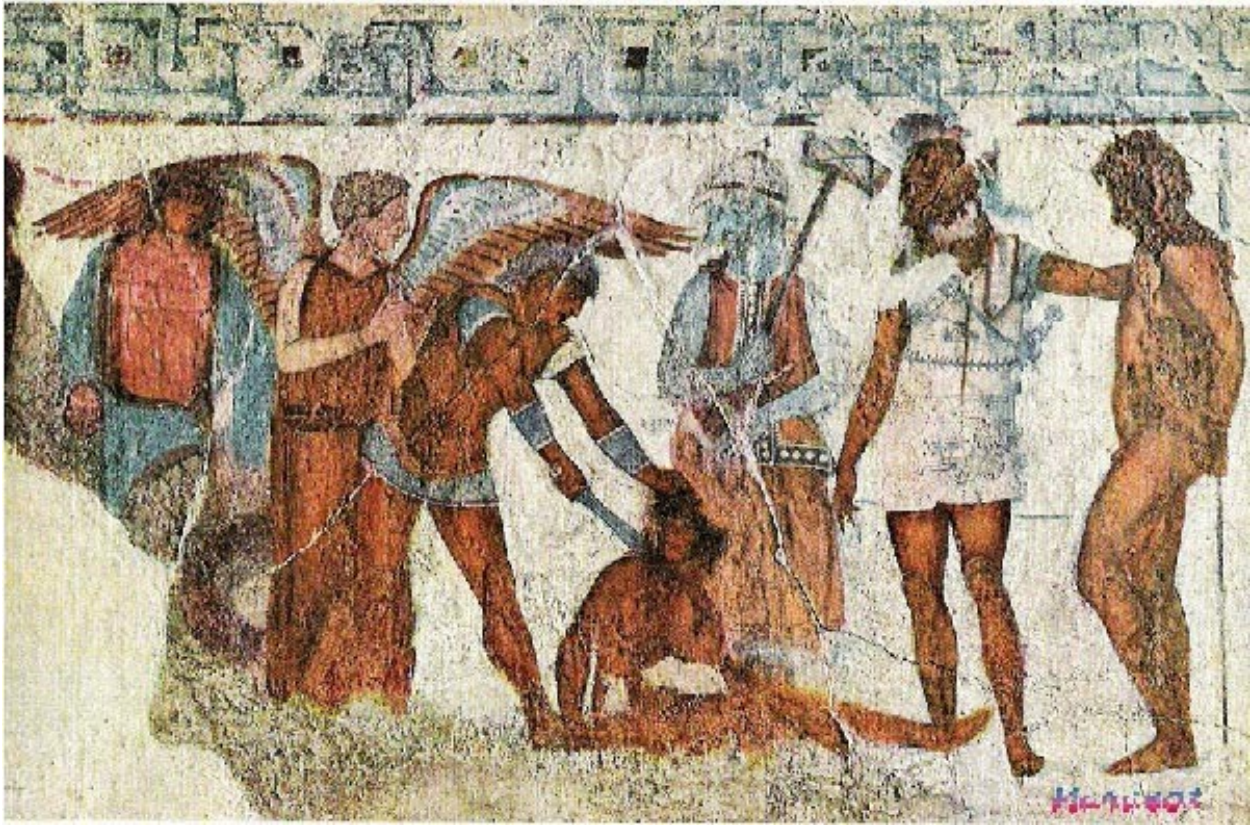




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**Sacrifice of the Trojan Captives, François Tomb, Vulci, ~2nd century B.C.** The scene depicts the burial ceremony for the Greek hero Patroclüs. After burning his body on a bier, a tumulus was raised and games celebrated. Horses and captives were sacrificed and placed in the tumulus. Charon, the grim ferryman, stands ready with a hammer to hit the victim over the head before admitting him into the underworld, Hades. The angelic figure appears to be praying for the captive.



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Dancers, Tomb of the Bacchants, Tarquinia, ~510 B.C.



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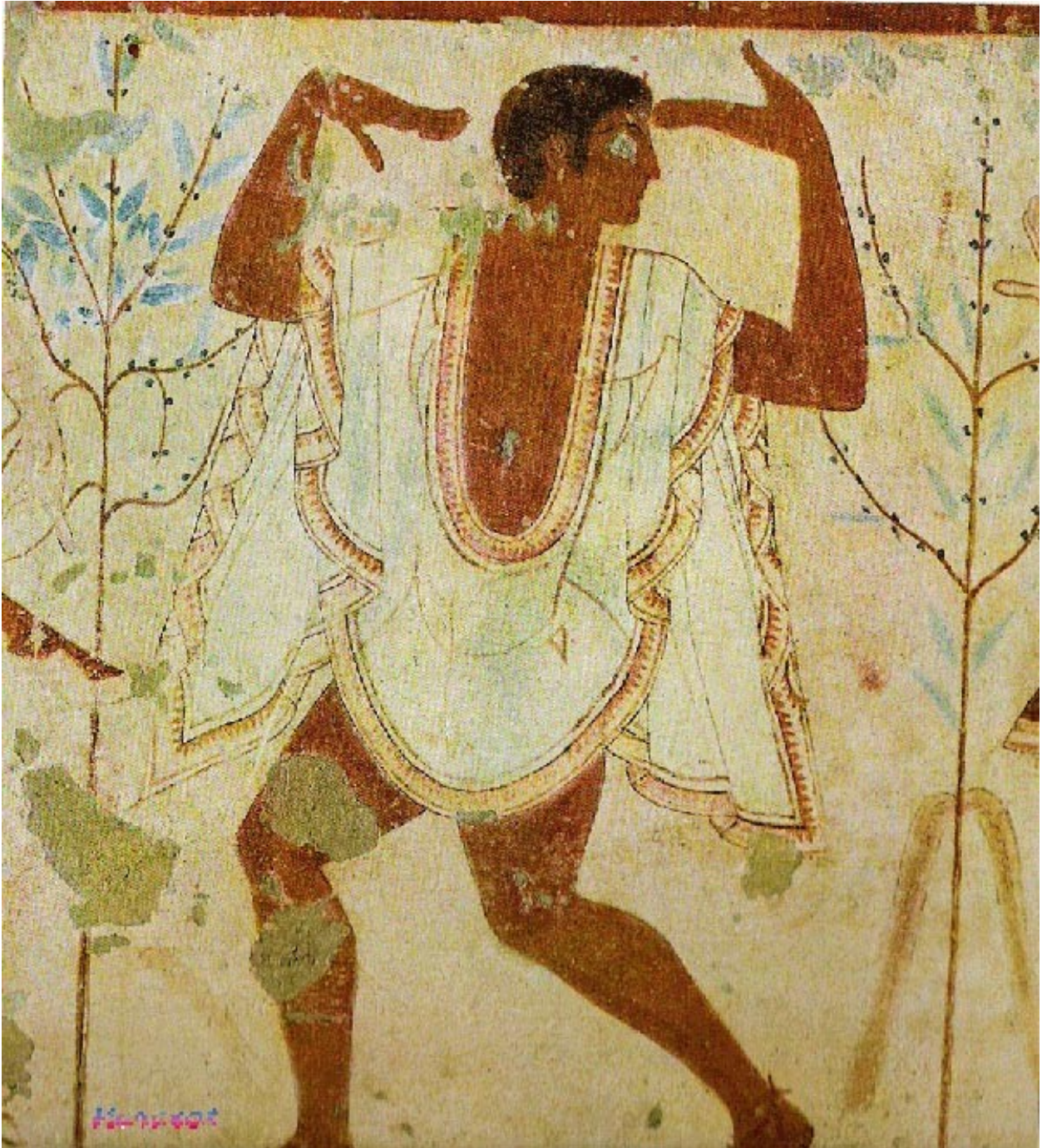
Male dancer, Tomb of the Trincelino, Tarquinia, ~470 B.C.



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**Male dancer, Tomb of the Triclinium, Tarquinia.** Note the poncho-like garment.



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**Dancing woman, Tomb of the Lionesses, Tarquinia, ~520 B.C.** Located on the back wall; behind her is a vase or cauldron which may have to do with rebirth, as in Celtic beliefs. See the [Gundestrup caldron](#), where Celtic warriors are dipped into a cauldron and given a new life.



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**Woman dancer, Tomb of the Triclinium, Tarquinia**



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**Back wall, detail, Francesca Giustiniani Tomb, Tarquinia, ~ 5th century B.C.** The man holds a crook in his left hand. Not seen in this image, to the left of the woman, is a chariot, and the woman may be protesting his departure in the chariot.



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Lyre-player and dancing woman, Tomb of the Triclinium, Tarquinia, 470 B.C.



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**Player on the double pipes, Tomb of the Triclinium, Tarquinia, ~470 B.C.** Note the sash hanging on the tree. The birds at rest in the trees probably has something to do with the sash of the departed in the tree; i.e., rebirth. See Note (1).



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Player on the double pipes, Tomb of the Leopards, Tarquinia, ~480 B.C.



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**Scene from the François Tomb, Vulci.** The inscriptions above the heads of the two figures appear to say:  
FR-1 ELVR TIES Translation: to cleanse (L. eluo-luere-lui-lutum) the day (L. dies-ei, day; diu, by day;  
diutius, longer; Welsh, dydd; Scot, di)

FV-3 ARA \_\_





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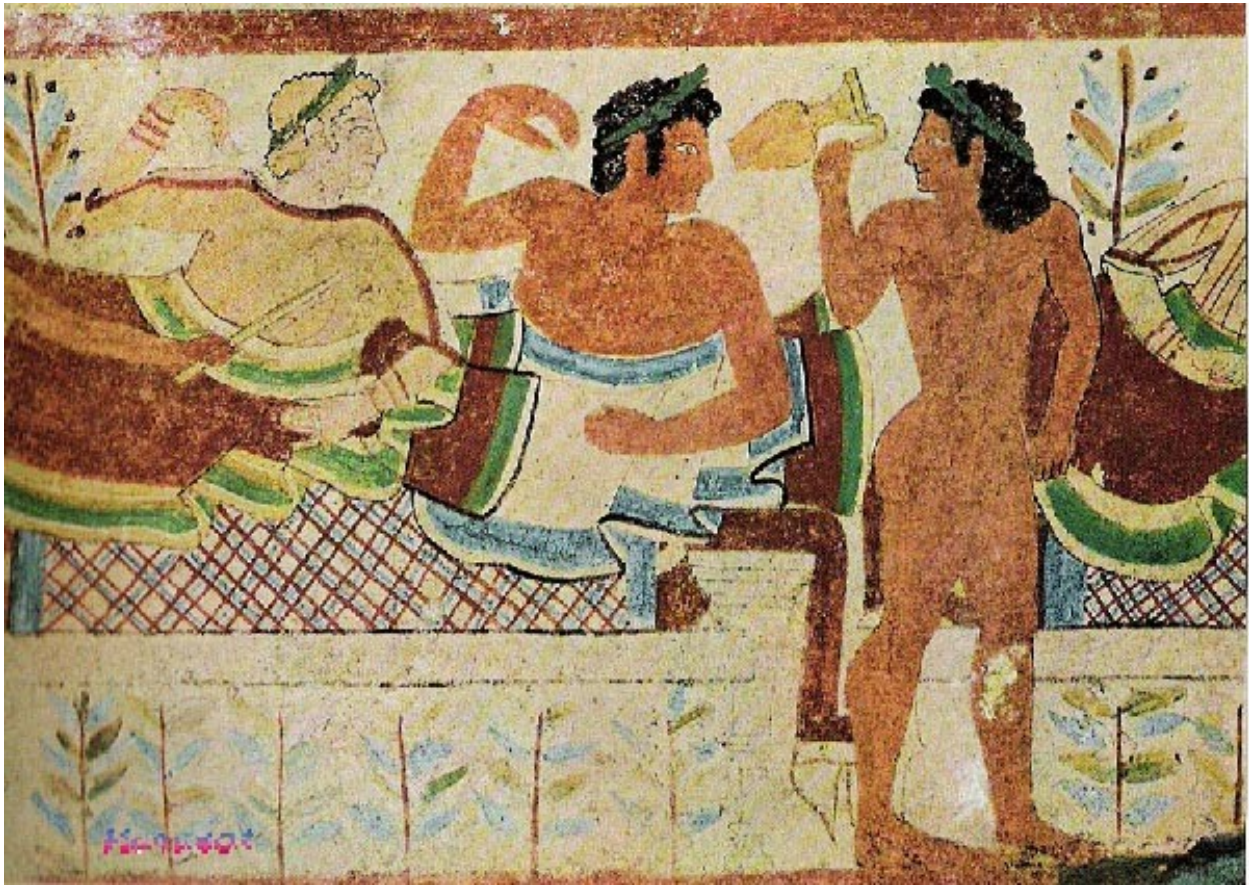
**Scene from the François Tomb. Death of the brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, sons of king Oedipus of Thebes.** The brothers had agreed to rule on the throne of Thebes together but went to war against each other. The war is known as "The Seven against Thebes."



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**Banquet scene, Tomb of the Leopards, Tarquinia, ~470 B.C.** Note what appears to be a "Tartan" fabric on the couch. Part of the banquet appears to have involved a ritual drink (probably wine) which may have been like mead or Hindu Soma.



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**Banquet scene, Tomb of the Funeral Couch, Tarquinia, ~460 B.C.** possibly painted by the same artist who painted the Tomb of the Triclinium (Lat. dining-couch, dining room)



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**Banquet scene in the Tomb of the Shields, Tarquinia.** The scene has an inscription which appears to have been written over earlier inscriptions.

**Script BS: Fresco in the "Tomb of the Shields," Tarquinia, 3rd century B.C. Text:**

BS-6: (left to right) AR ATIA IV (right to left) TAR APA [Translation (text damaged, hard to read) the altar (L. ara-ae) of Attis the day (L. dies-ei, day; diu, by day; diutius, longer; Welsh, dydd; Scot, di) ; the bull (L. taurus-i; It. toro; Fr. taureau; Welsh, tarw; Gr. tavros) he plows (L. aro-are) or alternatively, of the field (L. arvum-i)]

BS-11: CA\_ ASIE A \_\_\_\_\_ IA NT \_ \_

BS-15: ET. CE KANERI TENE RIALS MASA [Translation: and, even (L. et) : to us (It. ce) of the Chaneri to



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hold (L. teneo, tenere, tenui, tentum) the royals (L. regius-a-um; It. reale, Fr. royal) of the mass [tomb] (L. massa-ae)]

BS-21: AI ATIE: ERCE 8ISES \_\_\_\_\_S: RAM\_\_\_\_E: CLES NASR [Translation: [ai!, woe! of the Ati (sons of Atys): about / towards, about (L. erga) .....you look at, visit L. visio, visere, visi, visum; It. visione, vision; Fr. viser, to sight) \_\_\_\_\_RAM \_\_\_\_\_E : the keys (L. clavis-is, It. chiave; Fr. clé, clef) to be born (L. nascor-i, natus and gnatus).]

B-25: SILCI : Translation: Silence! (L. silesco-ere, to become silent, grow still; silicernium-i, a funeral feast)

Note: This mural appears to be of the same man as Script BS-1, and here we have another and older woman, perhaps his mother. She is handing him an egg, a symbol of rebirth. The couch appears to be the same couch in both murals. The script is badly deteriorated. In the former mural Script BS-1 the man must be the departed. The script appears to be a continuation of the other script and this woman offering him an egg may be the mother or mother-in-law. In the first mural the man is sharing a bowl whose contents could be considered to be a drink, possibly like mead, or wine. In the Iliad pouring wine on the pyre in the funeral ceremony was practiced and in the Rig Veda (See [Banquet.html](http://Banquet.html)) we witness sacred banquets, usually at sunrise, noon, and sunset, centered around the offering of Soma, a drink that appears to have been made from Cannabis (marijuana) plants. The use of Cannabis was also found in Scythian tombs and Soma was used in early Persian (Avestan) rituals. In the Celtic rite we witness warriors being dipped into a magic cauldron and renewed. It appears, therefore, that both the egg offering and the bowl offering represent renewal, which is what the banquet scenes are about. The text, therefore, should tell us what is happening in this rite.

Line BS-7 contains the word ATIA and BS22 ATIE. ATI is used in many scripts, translated as being of the gens Atis / Atys, the Lydian ancestor of the Etruscans. The suffixes "ie" and "ia" correspond to a feminine names appearing in Etruscan scripts, such as those of Persephone ("ie") and Helen ("ai"). The Lydians were known for the extraordinary equality they gave to their women. From them we received the word, lady. The Etruscan burials also represent an unusual equality between the sexes. We may speculate that they followed a matrilineal system.

The Chaneri would appear to be a royal line traced to Atys, father of Tyrsennus, through the mother who assures the departed son by giving him an egg of rebirth. She may, in fact, be one of those buried in the tomb and thus is greeting him in the underworld (Orcus). Musicians and dancers depict a continuation of life after death – as in Egyptian tombs. Except for attendants one would think that all of those painted in banquet scenes would be either recently passed away or ghosts of the dead at the moment of the painting,. The younger lady who is weeping in BS-1 would not appear to be of the dead, and the text seems to follow context of the living girl saying good-bye to the dead man, who is of royalty and taking the ship to the Underworld, Orcus. The Chaneri would thus be the royal family of 3rd century B.C. Tarquinia.



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**Script BS: Fresco in the "Tomb of the Shields," Tarquinia, 3rd century B.C.**

BS-1: FELER VR\_R AFLE RV FELCHA AP RONAI. [Translation: [FELER (a popular name) to speak (L. oro-are) the prince / lord (L. aule) I bedew (L. roro-are) of Velche (town in Campania; See also FELKES, TC-307) from (L. a, ab, abs) Ronai (personal name). The man holds a bowl, offering to the sad woman. The bowl is used frequently in Etruscan murals, appearing also in the hands of a withered old man in the [Divine Mirror.html](http://Divine_Mirror.html).



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**Banqueter, Tomb of the Lioness, Tarquinia, ~520 B.C.** Of interest in this image is the fact that he holds an egg, a symbol of rebirth, in his right hand, and he seems to be focused on the sash hanging in front of him. [Pysanka](#), a Ukrainian tradition of decorating Easter Eggs, gives us some background into the meanings of the eggs and their designs. The egg is a common symbol of the Etruscan "afterlife."



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**Back wall of the Tomb of the Leopards, Tarquinia, ~480 B.C. The two right-hand banqueters:** The left-hand appears to be being offered a wand. The wand, or staff, may be the word, *ramuer*, in Etruscan. In the *Rig Veda* two wands are frequently mentioned in the ceremony of the sacrifice, including lauds to Agni, the god of fire. The two sticks are the sticks that were used to make fire. The wand here and concept of a "magic wand" may apply, having to do with granting rebirth. The man on the right is holding in his right hand an egg. The egg is an important motif in the Etruscan concept of rebirth and the word, *O8, ov*, used in the Etruscan scripts appears to be "egg." (See *Etruscan GlossaryA.PDF*)

To get an idea what it was like to attend a Roman banquet, I recommend that you read, "Trimalchio's Banquet," at [Banquet4.html](http://Banquet4.html). The story is from *The Satyricon*, by Petronius, probably written during the time of Nero. It is, of course, a satire, but probably is a good reflection of Italian traditions.



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Servant cutting something (meat?) for the banquet, on a table with a drain, Golini Tomb, Orvieto



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**Youth diving, Tomb of Hunting & Fishing, Tarquinia, ~510 B.C.** This mural is part of an overall theme of hunting and fishing. The birds are fleeing from a man hunting with a sling, and the man diving appears to be chased by another man on the peak. Indo-European tradition identifies fish, and perhaps birds, like stars diving into the ocean at dawn. Diving into the water is like rebirth, just as the stars are reborn.



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Hunter and fishermen, Tomb of Hunting & Fishing, Tarquinia.



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Birds in flight, Tomb of Hunting & Fishing, Tarquinia, ~510 B.C. Note the colored wreaths.



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Two seated men, perhaps a consultation with an augur, stone slab from Caere, Louvre, Paris, ~middle of the 6th century B.C.



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**Hermes carrying a woman, slab from Caere, Louvre, Paris, ~6th century B.C.** Hermes (Latin, Mercury) is the messenger of the gods. According to Julius Caesar and other sources, the main god of the Celts was Hermes. Agni, the god of fire of the Rig Veda of India, has an important role as the messenger of the



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gods. Offerings to the fire are carried by Agni up to the abode of the gods. The Etruscan messenger may be like Agni, carrying the cremated soul to heaven. The Etruscan name of Hermes is TVRMS.



**Rulers of the Underworld, Tomb of Orcus, Tarquinia, 3rd or 2nd century B.C.** Shown is Aita (Hades; also known as Orcus) on his throne. Next to him is Phersipnei (Greek Persephone, wife of Hades), and facing them is the three-headed grandson of the Gorgon Medusa, Geryon. Geryon was the king of Erytheia (Cadiz, a major Phoenician port in the south of Spain). Hercules stole his cattle; later Geryon was killed; no doubt here he is registering his complaint regarding the cattle theft. Note that Phersipnei has snakes in her hair and Aita has a snake over his right shoulder.



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**These (Theseus) threatened by a demon, Tomb of Orcus, Tarquinia.** Theseus is known for killing the Minotaur of King Minos to save the lives of the Athenian children sent in sacrifice to it; but he had many adventures, and the one shown here involved his friend Peirithous, with whom he had abducted the daughter of Zeus, Helen, when she was about 11 years old. Later she was abducted by Paris a prince of Troy. But Peirithous later convinced Theseus that they ought to abduct Hades' wife, Persephone. Hades froze them there in the "seat of forgetfulness," frozen by snakes, until Hercules found them there and rescued Theseus and some say Peirithous was freed as well.



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**Typhon, a titan with serpent-legs. Tomb of the Typhon, 1st century B.C. In the Greek myth Typhon, or**



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Typhoeus (Τυφωεύς, *Tuphōeus*), was a monster born to Ge that had a hundred burning snake heads and spoke with voices of men and animals. He battled with Zeus, and in one of many tales Zeus crushed Typhon's smoking body under a mountain. Some say Zeus threw Sicily on top of him, giving Mt. Etna life. Here the monster's legs are snakes and its palms are flush against the ceiling, holding it up. His grey-blue colors reflect the grimness of the realm of Charon and his lord, Aita (Hades).



Chimera & lion, François Tomb, Vulci.



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Sphinx, of a Boccanera slab from Caere, 5th century B.C., British Museum



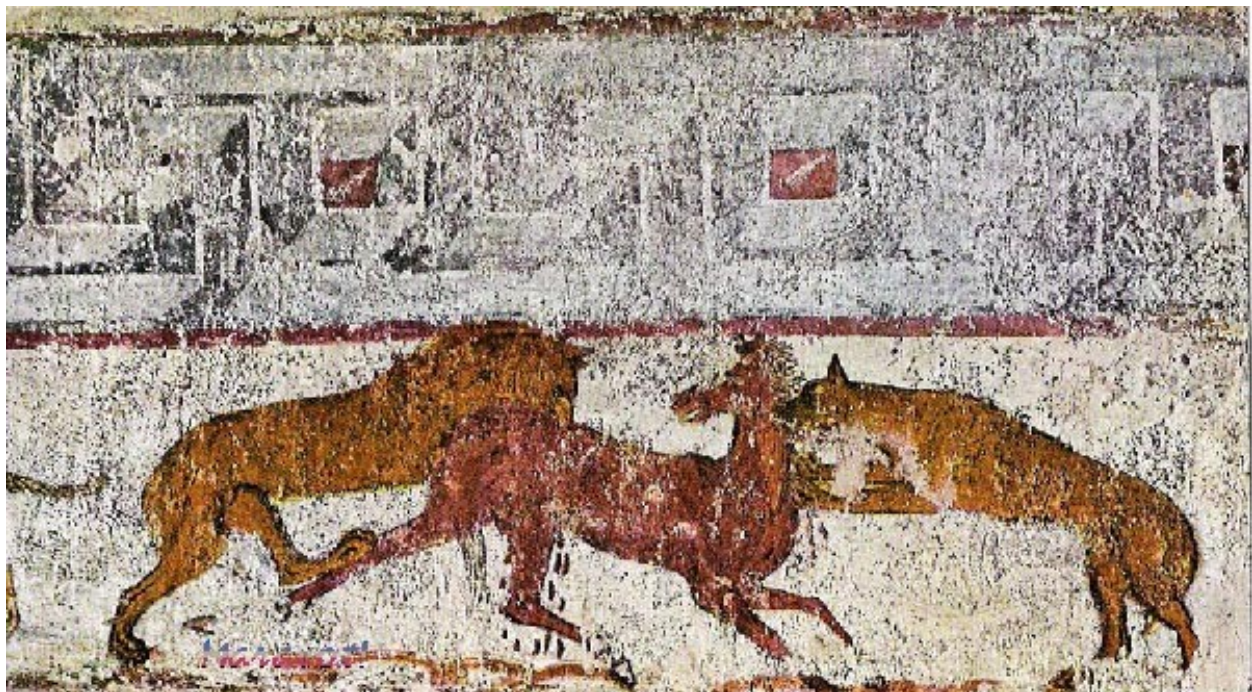
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Gazelle attacked by a lion, Tomb of the Bacchants, Tarquinia, ~510 B.C.



Lions attacking a horse, , François Tomb, Vulci



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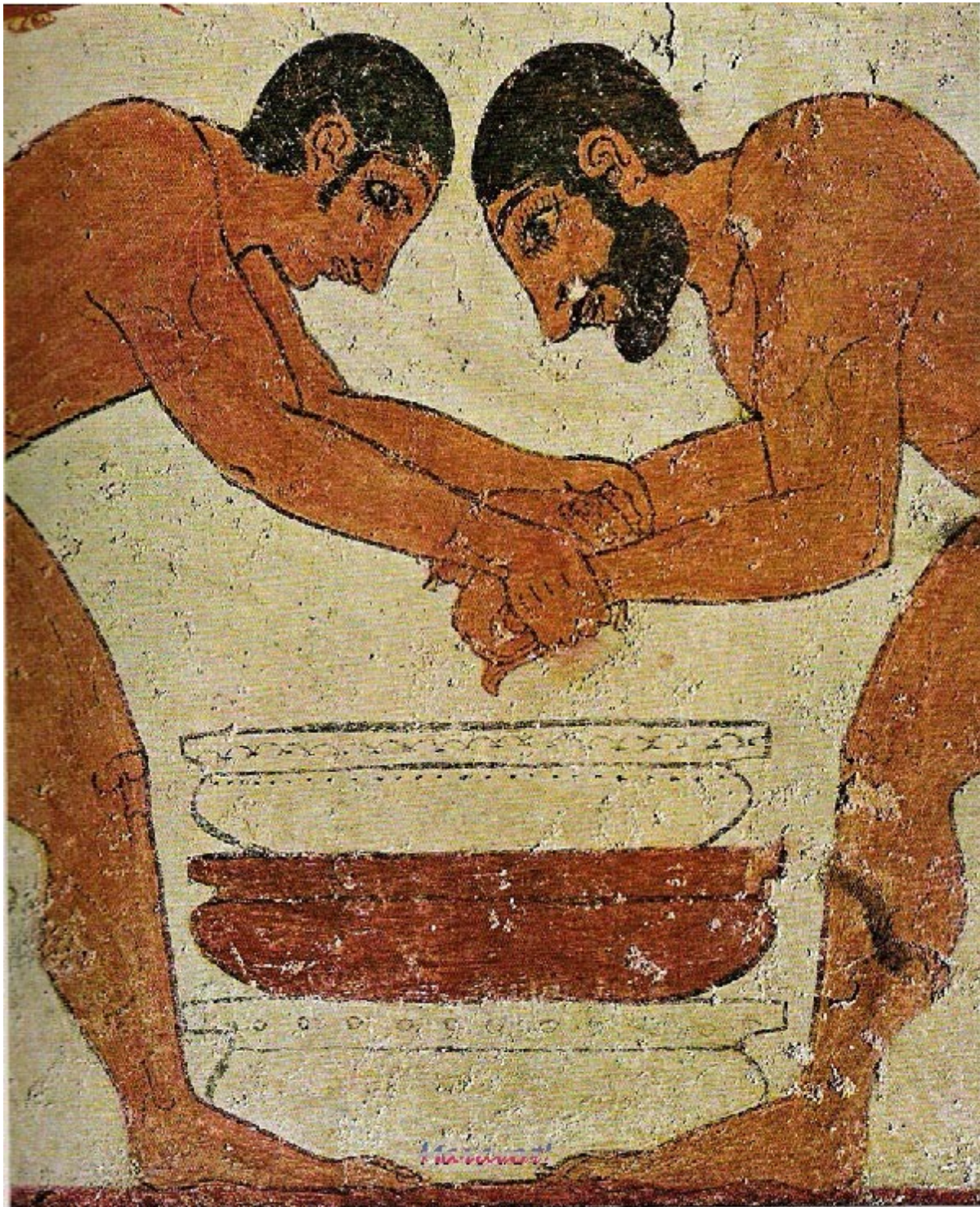
**Back wall, Tomb of the Baron, Tarquinia, ~510 B.C.** The deceased may be the woman to whom the drink is being offered. Note the wreaths or ring, a common device, and the Hippocampus and dolphins. Note (2)



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**Detail, wrestlers, Tomb of the Augurs, Tarquinia, ~530 B.C** Behind them appears to be a caldron. As illustrated in Homer's Iliad, part of the tradition when burying a hero in a tumulus included war games and contests such as wrestling. A ceremony involving the pouring of wine over the bier and celebrating with the wine was also involved. Among the Celts mead (an alcoholic drink made with honey) and wine



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was used; in India the heroes celebrated with Soma, a beverage that may have included hemp ([cannabis](#) / marijuana). Cannabis has been found in Scythian tombs in Siberia.



**Wrestlers, Tomb of the Monkey, Chiusi, ~480 B.C.** More funeral games are displayed here in celebration of the dead hero. Along with wrestling, which is being judged here, there would be chariot races. Funeral games are also the theme in the Tomb of the Chariots in Tarquinia.



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Racehorse with youths, Tomb of the Funeral Couch, Tarquinia, ~460 B.C.

### Notes:

(1) The sash may relate to the girdle worn by Venus (Greek Aphrodite). It was a magic girdle, and one can see on a [Red Attic Vase Himeros](#) carrying it. The vase is from [Erotes\\_himeros.gif from, http://www.theoi.com/Kronos/Erotes.html](#). According to Bullfinch's Mythology, "Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, possessed an embroidered girdle called Cestus, which had the power of inspiring love. Swans, roses, and myrtle were some of the symbols sacred to Venus which covered the belt. Venus sometimes loaned her girdle to others. Jupiter (Greek Zeus) and Juno (Greek Hera) were on opposite sides of the Trojan War. At one point, Juno borrowed the magic girdle which heightened her charms to



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such a degree that she was quite irresistible. So prepared, Juno visited her husband, Jupiter, who sat on Olympus watching the battle. When he beheld her, she looked so charming that the fondness of his early love revived, and, forgetting the contending armies and all other affairs of state, he thought only of her and let the battle go as it would." In Etruscan mythology, Tinia is Jupiter and Vni (Uni) is Juno.

(2) The Hippocampus was frequently depicted on Phoenician coins from Tyre dating ~330 B.C. It also appeared on Etruscan coins. The Hippocampus is a mix of seahorse and monster and is often depicted with the god Melqart riding it. Melqart was the supreme god of the Phoenicians, a sun-god, and part of a triad. Melqart's temple was the location of the sacred fire; he was the chief protector of the city and ships at sea, since he could control storms (like Poseidon). He symbolized the annual cycle of seasons and the dying and regeneration of vegetation. Here the Hippocampus in the Tomb of the Baron is probably calling on either Melqart or a similar god and belief.

To read more about Melqart go to: <http://www.ancientroute.com/religion/Godsname/melqart.htm>. To view the Phoenician Hippocampus coins go to: <http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/phoenicia/byblos/i.html>.

This tomb offers evidence, correlating with the [Pyrgi Scripts](#), which were written in Etruscan in two gold panels and Phoenician in a third gold panel. The inscription has to do with a dedication involving the consort of Melqart, Ishtar, and further work is needed to be done in translating the Etruscan portion of the script. It appears that the Etruscan goddess, Aph, was like Ishtar or Artemis. The Etruscan scripts record a controversy of Aph and commemorate the festival of HERAM: Hera (Lat. Heraea-orum).

Launched: 05.25.13

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