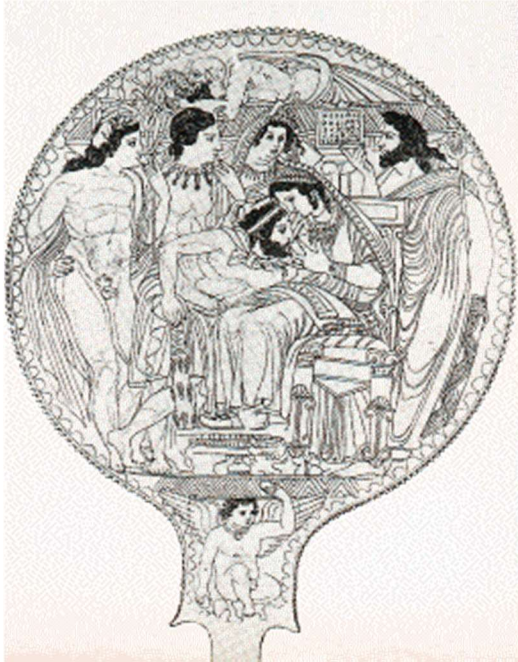


The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

by Mel Copeland

Update September 8, 2017



Uni suckling Heracles, Script AH.
This mirror was found in Volterra and is in
the Museo Archeologico, Florence.

The Etruscans were masters in many arts, including manufacture of gold and silver jewelry, pottery and mirrors. Their mirrors have been found from Africa to the Black Sea, and what is most fascinating about their mirrors is their gifted way of retelling “their” mythology. We put the word “their” in quotes, because their mythology seems to be focused around Greek mythology. However, the Etruscan version of the Greek tales often had an unexpected, sometimes wry, twist. The unique perspectives of Etruscan mythology, seen in the murals of their tombs and engraved on their mirrors, tend to focus around heroes of the Trojan War and Helen of Troy.¹ Regardless of the subject matter, the Etruscan story-tellers excelled at making one think about the plot behind the scene, and there are many such mirrors with unusual twists. For instance, we have the Volterra Mirror, Script AH,² which shows a bearded Heracles (Etr. Hercle, L. Hercules, Gr. Heracles) suckling at the breast of the Etruscan goddess Uni (Etr. VNI, L. Juno, Greek Hera). This plot involved Hera’s jealousy

over the philandering ways of her consort Zeus (Etr. TINIA, L. Jupiter). It seems that Alcmena was seduced by Zeus, who had disguised himself as her husband, Amphytrion, while he was away at sea fighting Taphian pirates, and produced a son, Heracles. Hera attempted to stop the delivery by causing the goddess Eileithyia to tightly cross her legs and fingers, as a charm to prevent the birth while waiting outside the delivery room. However, one of Alcmena’s attendants, Galanthis saw the charm and suddenly rushed out of the room crying out joyfully that the child had been born. Startled, Eileithyia rose up, forgetting the charm, and then the cries of two babies could be heard. Alcmena had given birth to twins, Alcaeus or Heracles and Iphicles. Fearing the wrath of Hera, Alcmena attempted to expose Heracles, but the goddess Athena found him and persuaded the unsuspecting Hera to suckle him. Another version of the story says that Zeus put the baby to the sleeping Hera’s breast. When she awoke,

¹ “Unique Perspectives of Etruscan Mythology,” Mel Copeland,
https://www.academia.edu/721298/Unique_perspectives_in_Etruscan_mythology_Rev._1.28.13

² Text and image from “Etruscan Phrases,” Mel Copeland, http://www.maravot.com/Etruscan_Phrases_a.html.
Updated versions of Etruscan Phrases texts are available at academia.edu/MelCopeland.

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

the spilled milk became the Milky Way.³

Thus, if we were to examine the Etruscan version of the story the anomaly of a bearded Heracles suckling the goddess's breast is somewhat shocking. Zeus is looking on, so this version of the story must relate to the version that Zeus put his son to Hera's breast. But then there is Zeus holding a document that says:



AH-1--ECA: SeREN: Translation: this is (It. ecco, adv.) serene (It. sereno, m.; adj. serene)

AH-3 TFA: IK NAC: (C from line AH6) Translation: he regards/watches over (tueo-ere, Ind. Conj. 3rd Pers. tueat) or alternatively, the two (L. duo-ae-o; It. due; Fr. deux; Welsh, dau, dwy; Gr. Dyo; Persian, do) here (L. hic [and heic], hice; It. qui; Fr. ici) I am born, born (L. nascor-; Ind. Pres. nasco).

AH-6 HERCLE: Translation: Hercules (L. Hercules-is, m.)

AH-7 VNIA Le: CL (CL is part of AH-9) Translation: the (goddess) Uni there / to her (Fr. le, la) he calls. Note: VNIA is gen. case for Uni, seen at Au13 as well. Vnia is mentioned at Au13 in the context of a parallel Punic text referring to Ishtar. CaL connects to A in AH-9 based on script Z usage. See [Etruscan GlossaryA.xls](#).

AH-9 (CaLA) NORA: SCE the young married woman/daughter-in-law (L. nurus-us, f.; It. nuora, f.) you know (L. scio, scir, scivi or scili, scitu; Conj. Pres. 3rd Pers. Single scaet).

8eLER is used again, where Alcestis, the wife of Admetus, sacrifices her life to save that of her husband.



Alcestis and Admetus, Etruscan vase from Vulci⁴

V-1 – ECA EVS CE: NAC: ATRVM:
8eLER RFCE Translation: Behold! (L. en!, ecce!) The dawn (L. Eos) to us (It. ce): born (L. nascor-ari); of the dark (black, dark (L. ater, atra, atrum, 2nd Decl. singl. acc.-um)
Veler of the funeral pile (L. rogos-i, m.) Note: on RFCE: “F” after a

consonant is a vowel, usually “u” but here an “o” is suggested because of the context noted below. Otherwise it is an “f” preceding a vowel. The Etruscans also used the Greek Phi: Φ, “f.”

³ Our source of mythology used in this document is The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology, by Edward Tripp, New American Library, NY, 1970.

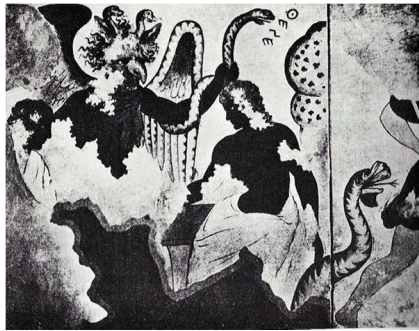
⁴ See http://www.maravot.com/Translation_ShortScripts_a.html for larger image.

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

V-8 – ALCeSTI Translation: Alcestis, daughter of Pelion who married Admetus and was so faithful to her husband, Admetus

V-9 ATMITE Translation: Admetus.

When he was dying Admetus, husband of Alcestis, was told that only a substitute willing to die on his behalf will save him. Admetus asked his aging parents if they would give up the remaining years of their lives, but they refused. But Alcestis offered to die on his behalf. It is believed that she was later resurrected by Persephone, Queen of Hades. To the left of her is Charon, also called "The Ferryman" of Hades. He clubbed people on the head to assure that they were dead and would not let them reenter



the land of the living. The character with the serpents may be Tuchulcha. Both demons are pictured in Etruscan tombs. Tuchulcha is also seen in a tomb mural shaking his snakes at Theseus who was trapped in Hades on the chair of forgetfulness, attempting to save his somewhat rash companion, Peirithoüs, who had attempted to abduct Persephone (Etr. Phersipnei, ΘERSIPNEI) from Hades and consequently was frozen to the chair of forgetfulness. Theseus was unsuccessful in the venture into Hell and was eventually rescued by Heracles, as he went down into Hell to capture the dog of Hell,

Cerberus, as one of the labors directed by Eurystheus.

Charon is featured in Etruscan tombs chasing the souls of the dead. The tombs often have doors painted on the wall, allowing them an escape. Otherwise they will forever be lost in Hell (Hades).



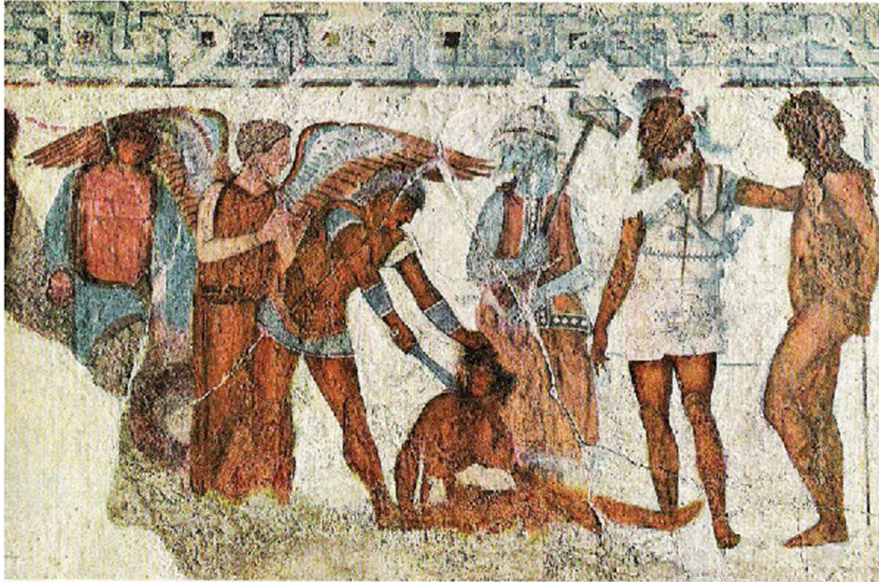
Script BC

BC-1 CHARON (KARVN) [Translation: Charon, ferryman of Hades (L. Charon-ontis)]

BC-2 CHONCHVLIS (KVNKVLIS) [Translation: you would tread down, trample under feet. (L. conculco-are, Conj. Pres. 2nd Pers. Single conculcēs)]

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

Were it not for Hermes who could restore one to terra firma after being captured in Hell, no souls would have a chance to escape. Charon, as the ferryman, would charge souls awaiting to cross the river



Styx into the Underworld. Based upon the experience of the goddess Persephone, entering Hades involved several gatekeepers, each of whom would demand a passage toll. Because Persephone had no money, she was forced to strip off her jewelry and clothing to pay each gatekeeper, until reaching the Underworld where Charon served at the river Styx. Note that

here again Charon waits with his hammer to claim the victims, as in the case of Alcesti.)

Alcesti's robe is of interest, since it is decorated with the "triple-dot" pattern apparently identifying holiness and royalty in other Etruscan illustrations, such as the "Divine Mirror, Script DM. Another view of the Etruscan CHARVN can be seen in a mural called "Sacrifice of the Trojan Captives" in the François Tomb, Vulci, ~2nd century B.C. (See http://www.maravot.com/Etruscan_Murals.html).



Cabinet des Médailles
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
4th c. B.C. chalice, Vulci

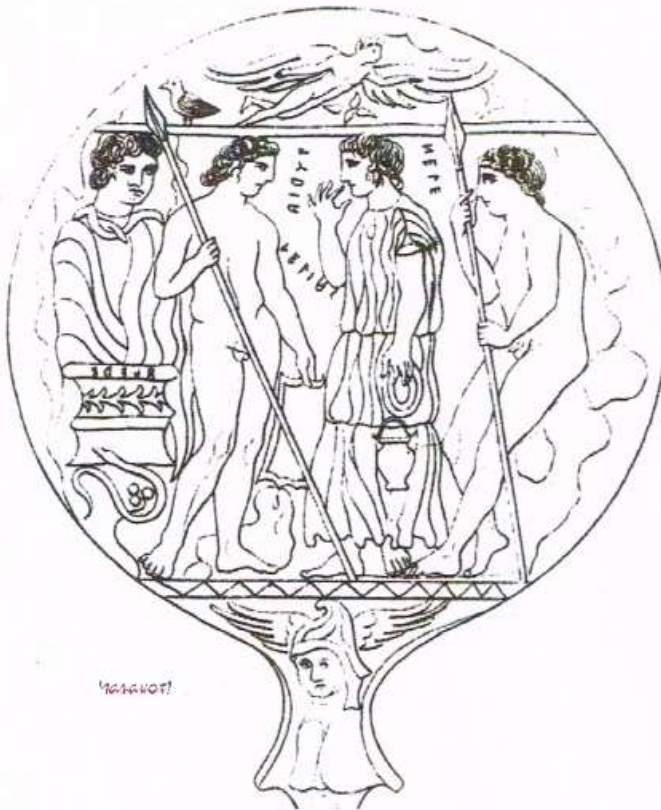
The scene depicts the burial ceremony for the Greek hero Patroclus. After burning his body on a bier, a tumulus was raised and games celebrated. Horses and captives were sacrificed and next to the burning bier in the tumulus. Charon, the grim ferryman, stands ready with a hammer to hit the victims over the head before admitting them into the underworld. A similar scene is on a wine bowl, a red-figured chalice from Vulci (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris), **Script VA**, discussed at http://www.maravot.com/Translation_ShortScripts_c.html. It shows Ajax (Etr. AIFAS) thrusting his sword into the neck of the hapless Trojan victim, with Charon standing by with his huge mallet.

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

Script AX Borgia Mirror

Bronze Mirror, possibly from Perugia, late 4th cent. B.C., Borgia Collection, Naples. Illustration after E. Gerhard, *Etruskische Spiegel*, vol. 2, Berlin, 1840/1867, pl. 170.⁵

This mirror is one of two Etruscan mirror illustrations that relate to the story of Tyro and her twin sons Neleus and Pelias that were discussed in a paper by Dr. Lora Holland. The Etruscan names of these mythological Greek characters are: NELE, TYRIA and PELIAS. A bust (called an “apparition” by Dr.



Holland) on a pedestal has a coiled snake around the neck and there is another snake at the base of the column. Written on the pedestal is the word 8LERE, interpreted by Dr. Holland as follows: “An inscription on the rim of the well-head in Etruscan letters running from right to left reads *flere*, a difficult word but which is of sacred significance and seems to indicate an image or an offering.”

The word Dr. Holland interpreted as *flere* is actually a common word seen in the illustrations of Apollo and the death of Admetus above. The word declines: VELER (8eLER), VELERE (8eLERE), VELEREI (8eLEREI), VELERES (8ELERES), VeLERI (8ELERI). The name Valerius is a common Latin name found among Latin leaders and generals, such as, Marcus Valerius Corvus, Gaius Valerius Flaccus (consul) Lucius Valerius Flaccus, Publius Valerius Laevinus, and M. Valerius Laevinus.⁶ However, as we have seen above, the term seems to be used in reference to the afterlife, at least death. In view of its use in the Borgia Mirror, Script AX, and

the Zagreb Mummy, Script Z, the definition of the term would probably be “the infinite soul.” It existed before birth and continues through the underworld and afterlife.

The word *veler* declines and is not a verb. The declension VELEREI corresponds with the declensions seen in other personages, such as Helen of Troy ELENEI and ELENAI, PERSEPHNEI, wife of Hades, MUSEI (MVSEI), etc. The word is used copiously in the Zagreb Mummy, the longest extant Etruscan text. The text is written in Etruscan on the wrappings of a mummy found in Egypt, now in the Zagreb, Croatia, and

⁵ Illustration used in paper, “Wells of Wonders: New Discoveries at Cetamura del Chianti,” by Dr. Lora Holland, editor Nancy T. de Grummond, Catalogue of the Exhibitions June 9-Sept. 30, 2017, Florence National Archaeological Museum, MAF Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze.

(https://www.academia.edu/34446326/Water_and_Rituals_at_Cetamura)

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Roman_generals

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

contains formulae dedicated to get the soul of the departed through the underworld. It addresses the departed as VeLERE, etc. The word in its several declensions may be found at: 8eLER, Z11, Z113, Z543, Z551, Z561, Z1423, V-6; 8ELERE, AL-8; 8eLERE, Z50, Z195, Z245, Z842, Z851, Z975, Z1073; 8eLEREI, Z1013; 8eLERES, AL-8, AV-7, 8ELEREs, Z568, 8eLERI, Z1430.⁷

For example, we have the following context in the Zagreb Mummy:⁸



Z110 IN Ce • TEC • 8eLER RESIN CE CISVM PVT T..... Translation: in (L. in) here (fr. ici; It. ce, adv. there) I cover/bury (L. tego, tegere, texi, tectum, Ind. Pres. 1st Pers. Single tegō) **Veler** the resin (L. resina-ae) to us (It. ce) a chariot (L. cisum-i) capable, able (L. potis, pote) T...]

Z551 LA IFISCA • LYS TRIS 8eLER • FAC Le TvNAM there (L. la, Fr. la) he disembowels (L. eviscerō-are); the light/life/hope (L. lux, lucis) of the sad/gloomy/bitter (L. tristis; It. triste, Fr. triste) **Velere**; I make/do/form (L. facio, facere, feci, factum, Ind. Pres. 1st Pers. Single facio) there (Fr. le) by, from the thunder (L. tonitrus-us, Acc. Single -am; tono-are-ui-itum;; It. tuono, m.; Fr. tonnerre m.) Note: Etr. drops the final vowel in 1st Person: tego becomes tec.

Z561 E TvNAM • EIS NA IS • 8eLER ES CRA ISTI E TvNAM Translation: from (L. e, ex) the thunder (L. tonitrus-us, Acc. Single -am; v. tono-are-ui-itum; It. tuono, m.; Fr. tonnerre m.); to them (L. eis, gen. & dat. they; It. essi, esse, them) truly (L. ne, nae) of/that person (L. is, ea, id); **Veler** you are (L. es) he/she creates (L. creō-are) you (L. iste, ista, istud)

Z1423 IN TvNAM • RESAN • 8eLER • FEIFES • RESERI in (L. in) the thunder (L. tonitrus-us, Acc. Single -am; v. tono-are-ui-itum; It. tuono, m.; Fr. tonnerre m.) they reveal (L. resero-are) **Veler**; the long lived/enduring (L. vivax-acis) I revealed (L. resero-ari; Indi. Perf. 1st pers. single reseravi) Note: (The next line, Z1429 is unreadable).

⁷ For the location of these and 2,800+ other words in Etruscan Texts see our Etruscan GlossaryA:

[https://www.academia.edu/759774/Etruscan_Glossary_A_Update_05.19.17 - spreadsheet containing 2 800 Etruscan words that relate to Latin French and Italian](https://www.academia.edu/759774/Etruscan_Glossary_A_Update_05.19.17_-_spreadsheet_containing_2_800_Etruscan_words_that_relate_to_Latin_French_and_Italian)

⁸ Full text is at http://www.maravot.com/Translation_Zagreb_Mummy.html; an updated version is on academia.edu/MelCopeland.

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

Script AV — Votive bronze of Apollo.



AV-1 8ASTI: ROBRIS (RV8RIS) IRCE: CLEN: CEKA: Translation: fasti, list of legal days, court-days, list of magistrates (L. fasti-orum or fastus-a-um) of the oaks (L. rubor-oris, 3rd Decl. Acc. Pl. -ēs; Fr. rouvre, oak) towards, about (L. erga) the client or vassal, ally (L. liens-entis) whatever (L. quacumque; It. checche; Fr. quelque)

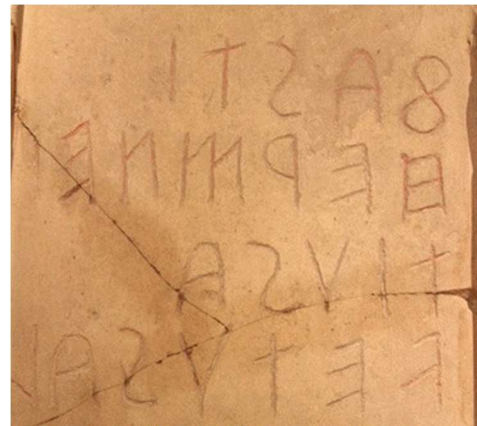
AV-6 MI: 8LERES: SPULARE (SPVLARE): ARIPVM Translation: mine (L. Gen. Single mei; meus-a-um; It. mi, myself) by the **Veleres** (Dat. N. Pl. -es) to strip, plunder, despoil, rob (L. spolio-are) Aripo, Aripus? Acc. Single -um (name unknown).

We believe that 8LER has an interpolated vowel, “e,” as is often the case with many other Etruscan words and seen in its declension It recalls the modern spelling of Serbia in English that the Serbs spell Srbia.

The character “8” appears to sometimes have the value of a “V” or in other instances a “B.” For instance we have the word for way, path, road: VIA (8IA) and VIAS (8IAS; Acc. Pl. -as; L. via-ae, It. via, Fr. voie); the word for vineyard: VINVM (8INVVM), L. vinum-i; the word for viper: 8IPER (L. viper-ae), the name of Velsina/Bologna, VELSiNI (8ELSiNI), L. Velsina, etc.⁹ A most interesting example on the use of “8” involves the word for brother, L. frater-tris. The Etruscan word

resembles the Celtic, Sanskrit word and it declines: brater (8RATER), bratro (8RATRV), bratrum (8RATRVVM), bratros (8RATRVVS). Irish: bráthair, Sanskrit bhratar, Persian barâdar, Belarus, brat.¹⁰

Note on the word 8ASTI: The word appears on the **Hermne tile** Script HT:



HT-1 8ASTI

HT-2 HERMNE TIVS A FETVS AL

Translation: [list of legal days (L. fasti-orum; It. fasto, Fr. faste, pomp, display) of Hermes (L. Hermes or Herma-ae, m.) the divine (L. dius-a-um) to (L. a) at the bringing forth of the young (L. fetura-ae, fetus-us) AL... (missing text). This incidentally is one of several instances where the “8” is an “f.” (See Etruscan Glossary A).

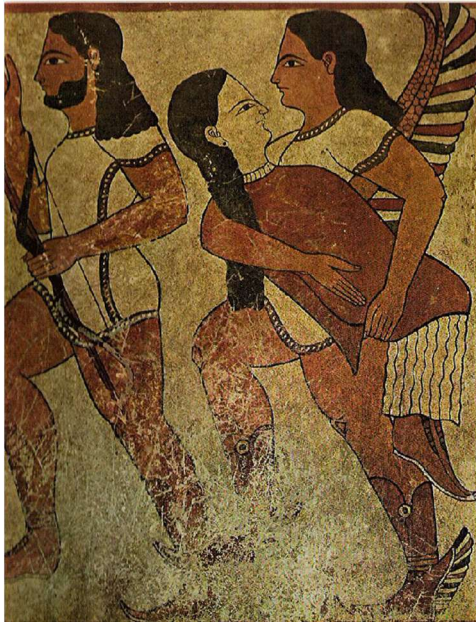
⁹ See Mel Copeland, Etruscan GlossaryA,

[https://www.academia.edu/759774/Etruscan_Glossary_A_Update_05.19.17 - spreadsheet containing 2 800 Etruscan words that relate to Latin French and Italian](https://www.academia.edu/759774/Etruscan_Glossary_A_Update_05.19.17_-_spreadsheet_containing_2_800_Etruscan_words_that_relate_to_Latin_French_and_Italian)

¹⁰ See Mel Copeland, Indo-European Table, <https://independent.academia.edu/MelCopeland>, paper in several sections,

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

This **Hermne** tile is interesting, since it uses the Greek term, Hermes, rather than the Etruscan term for Hermes, TVRMS. The “NE” suffix is an augmentative (like “-one,- ona” that is used to convey ideas of greater size (as in Italian), such as the name Etruscans called themselves, which declines, RASNA, RASNE, RASNES. If the tile commemorates the “feast of the bringing forth of the young,” then the concept of it being through Hermes makes sense, since he would carry souls from birth to death as the messenger of the gods and travelers. The festival may relate to the later Roman festival of Mercurlia. On May 15 merchants would sprinkle their heads, their ships and merchandise, and their businesses with water taken from the well at Porta Capena. If we compare it to the Greek festival of Hermes, the Hermaea, an athletic event is suggested. Usually the Hermaea honoured Hermes as patron of sport and gymnastics, often in conjunction with Heracles.



Hermes (Etr. TVRMS) 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 (Mercury). Agni, the god of fire of the Rig Veda of India, has an important role as the messenger of the 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.

From:

http://www.maravot.com/Etruscan_M

The Etruscan festival may have some relationship to the later Roman festival of Lupercalia held in February¹¹ and represented a purging of the old and bringing forth of spring. The rites were confined to the Lupercal cave, the Palatine Hill above it, and the Comitium, all of which were central locations in Rome's foundation myth. Near the cave stood the temple of Rumina, goddess of breastfeeding; and the wild fig-tree (Ficus Ruminalis) to which Romulus and Remus were brought by the divine intervention of the river-god Tiberinus. Plutarch, “life of Caesar,” described the Lupercalia rites:

“...many of the noble youths and of the magistrates run up and down through the city naked, for sport and laughter striking those they meet with shaggy thongs. And many women of rank also purposely get in their way, and like children at school present their hands to be struck, believing that the pregnant will thus be helped in delivery, and the barren to pregnancy.”

Coincidentally the Etruscans did celebrate a festival dedicated to the women only: the festivals of Hera (Etr. HERAM, Au63, HERAMAS, Au7; Heraea-orum, 1st Decl. Acc.

Single –um = am and Acc. Pl. -as). This festival probably occurred on May 1, now celebrated as May Day, and is the focus of the Pyrgi Gold Tablets, Script Au.¹²

Some characters the Etruscans used were undifferentiated. “P” was often written for “B”; the “T” was written for “D,” and sometimes the Greek theta “Θ” had a mixed use as a “d” and “th.” For instance, the

¹¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lupercalia>

¹² See Mel Copeland, “Work Notes on Bona Dea & the Goddess UNI...”:

https://www.academia.edu/9324091/Work_Notes_on_Bona_Dea_and_the_Goddess_Uni_-_a_survey_of_Etruscan_and_Latin_texts_relating_to_the_Pyrgi_Gold_Tablets_Update_11.16.16

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

mother of Achilles, Thetis, was spelled both as THETIS (ΘETIS) and THETHIS (ΘΕΘIS); the Etruscan queen Tanaquil, wife of Tarquin the Elder was spelled THANCHUILOS (ΘANCHVILVS). The characters “C”, “K,” and “↓” would be used as “k”; however, the “↓” was “ch,” as in the name of the seer Chalcis or the ferryman of the Underworld, Charon.

The Etruscans were organized into a confederation of 12 city states that would meet at a religious center at the Fanum Voltumnae near Volsina (the present-day Orvieto). The Fanum Voltumnae may have been the site of a sacred stream or well. Wells and streams, of course, were sacred among the Celts in Britain, who would throw their offerings into the Thames River near London, who considered their rivers and springs sacred, and the Germans who would offer their treasures to streams and bogs, sometimes including a human sacrifice. And, lest we forget, some of the heroes in the Trojan War were born from the god Poseidon and river gods.

The Borgia Mirror, Script AX, is another of the “head-scratching” illustrations so effectively created by Etruscan story-tellers. The three characters in the mirror, Tyro (Etr. TYRIA), Neleus (Etr. NELE) and Pelias (Etr. PELIAS), are tragic. Tyro was the daughter of Salmoneus and Alcidice. Tyro, a beautiful girl, was reared by her uncle Cretheus, king of Iolcus, who later married her. She fell in love with the river Enipeus and used to spend many hours on its banks. Poseidon took advantage of her infatuation by seducing her in the form of the river. Tyro bore twin sons secretly and exposed them in a field. Some say that Salmoneus, on learning of the births, refused to believe his daughter’s version of the children’s paternity and mistreated her, as did her stepmother, Sidero, whom Salmoneus had married upon the death of Alcidice. In any case, the boys were found and reared by horse herders, who named them Pelias and Neleus. Meanwhile, Tyro married Cretheus and bore him three sons – Aeson, Pheres and Amythaon. When Pelias and Neleus grew to manhood they discovered their mother. Pelias killed Sidero for her injuries to Tyro.

The Borgia Mirror and another from Bomarzo, now in the Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, Vatican, both show Tyro with her two sons by a well. And with the group is another, in the case of the Bomarzo Mirror, a character with a winged helmet appearing to emerge from the well, who appears to be Hermes. Hermes (Etr. TVRMS, L. Mercury) was the herald and messenger of the Gods and guide of travelers. Born from an encounter between Zeus and Maia, a daughter of Atlas and Pleione, he was very precocious as an infant. He invented the Lyre, using the shell of a tortoise that he killed outside his cave. Then he stole 50 cattle from Apollo (Apollo also claimed to have invented the Lyre), then traveling to Alpheius he made a fire with fire-sticks, which he invented for the occasion to sacrifice two cows to the twelve gods, eating none of the meat himself. After this the trickster returned to the cave, crawled through the keyhole of the door, and put back on his swaddling clothes. When he grew up Zeus appointed him herald of the Olympian gods and a guide to mortal travelers. The symbol of his office was his Caduceus, or herald’s wand. It is said that Hermes saw to fighting snakes and laid his wand between them and they coiled themselves around it. His task of guiding men went on beyond death. It was Hermes’ duty to lead the souls of the dead down to Hades and, on rare occasions, back again.

Hermes, fell in love with Aphrodite (Etr. TVRAN, L. Venus) and though she refused him she finally consented to lie with him after he had stolen her slipper, and the seduction produced a child named after both of them: Hermaphroditus.

Hermes principal occupation was to serve Zeus as a herald and factotum and guide of the dead to Hades. As a guide to travelers he was often called Hermes the Helper. He showed this disposition especially clearly in the aid that he gave to Priam in the Greek camp and to Odysseus on Circe’s island.

Hermes’ basic function as helper of travelers, human and divine, is believed to have arisen, along with his name, from his origin as god of the stone-heap (*herma* or *hermation*). Such heaps of stones were erected as markers along paths, often with a larger, pillar-like stone set up in the center of each pile.

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

Although he was often represented in art as a handsome young man wearing winged sandals and a *petasos*, or traveler's broad-brimmed hat, his most usual image was no more than a head on a square pillar that was adorned with a man's genitals. These civilized versions of the ancient, rural *herm* were found in courtyards of houses, on street corners, and in marketplaces.¹³

In the Borgia Mirror we see a bust atop a column of a fellow whose face seems distorted. That would be Pelias. While the twins in both mirrors appear perfectly normal, we know one of them was not. When the horse herders found the two boys abandoned in the field, one of them, Pelias, had been trampled upon, on his face, leaving a livid mark (*pelios*). It was this mark that gave the child his name.

When they grew to manhood, the brothers discovered their mother, showing her evidence of their identity by producing the basket in which she had exposed them. They learned that Tyro had long been abused by her stepmother, Sidero, and enraged they pursued her to the precinct of Hera where Pelias killed her, even though she clung to the altars for sanctuary. Pelias' outrage to Hera continued through the rest of his life, ignoring the honors due the goddess; and his impiety was returned by Hera's punishment.

Pelias' violent nature and his lust for power led him to persecute both Neleus and their half-brother Aeson, who was the eldest son born to Tyro and her uncle King Cretheus. Although Aeson should have inherited Cretheus' throne of Iolcus, the most powerful city in Thessaly, Pelias prevented it, taking the throne himself and when Neleus claimed the throne Pelias turned on the twin and drove him out of the country. Neleus and his followers then sent up their kingdom at Pylus in Messenia.

Aeson's wife bore him a son that was stillborn. He married either Anaxibia, daughter of Bias, or Phylomache, daughter of Amphion, and she bore him a son and several daughters. Only one, Alcestis, became well known in her own right, later marrying Admetus. The boy was named Acastus.

Pelias became one of the most powerful Greek kings in his day, but his pleasure in this position was shattered by a prediction of the Delphic oracle that an Aeolid wearing one sandal would one day bring about his death. This oracle was fulfilled when Jason came to Iolcus wearing one dandal and demanded the throne (He had lost it crossing the river). He revealed that he was Aeson's son, who had not died but had been reared secretly by Cheiron the Centaur. Pelias argued to the son that he must earn the kingdom by fetching the Golden Fleece that was being guarded in Colchis on the Black Sea.

Jason gathered together his friends, including Heracles, and left Iolcus on that adventure that has come down to us as the *Argonautica*. To make a long story short, Jason steals the Golden Fleece with the help of the king of Colchis' daughter, Medea, and eventually returns to Greece and through various turns of the road becomes established at Corinth, where Medea had been invited to rule. Medea, a sorceress, and Jason had two children which she ended up murdering because of Jason's infidelity.

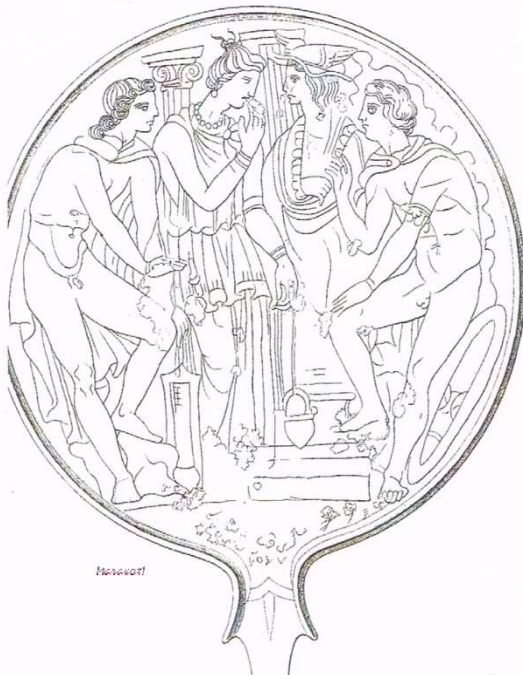
¹³ The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology, by Edward Tripp, New American Library, NY, 1970. p. 300-302.

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

Before this, when the two returned to claim Iolcus Hera took the opportunity to take out her revenge on Pelias for his impiety. She had Medea persuade the king's daughters to kill their father in the expectation that she would restore his youth. Apparently, after this Jason passed the throne of Iolcus to Acastus who celebrated funeral games in Pelias' honor that were among the most famous ever held.

In Corinth Jason fell in love with Glauce or Creüsa, daughter of King Creon, in order to win advantage for himself and his children, who had no rights as progeny of a barbarian woman. Therefore Jason divorced Medea and Creon exiled her. She took vengeance on Jason by killing his new wife, the old king Creon, and her own two children by Jason.

This, of course is a short version of the story involving Tyro and her twins. When we examine the story of Tyro and her two sons at the well, as illustrated by the Etruscans, we should know that the story at



Bomarzo Mirror, late 4th cent. B.C, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, Vatican, from *Etruskische Spiegel*, vol. 5, Berlin, 1897, pl. 82, discussed by Dr. Holland, of Tyro and her twins at the well receiving a prophecy.⁵

the well is probably about Pelias. And if the illustrator had in mind that Tyro and her two sons were there at the well to receive a prophecy, that prophecy would include the destruction of Pelias through his thirst for power and impiety towards Hera. In the case of the Borgia Mirror AX, the prophecy seems to be coming from Pelias himself, emerging from the underworld.

If this is so, then the Etruscan preoccupation with death and the afterlife seems to be telling us in this illustration that our soul, being infinite, like the Egyptian Ka, can speak to us from the underworld before death. In the Bomarzo Mirror it appears to be Hermes that is delivering the prophecy; in the Borgia Mirror, Script AX we seem to have Pelias himself delivering the prophecy! Because of the visit at the well Tyro knew the tragic fate of her two sons and how one of them, Pelias, produced the greatest Greek adventure of the period, of Jason and the Argonauts.

The Borgia Mirror's word, 8eLERE, atop the column at the well seems to address the spirit as being one with the dead, as was the case of Alcestis in her relationship with Admetus. In the image of Alcestis clinging to her husband Admetus we have Charon with his hammer waiting there to claim her. He knew she would be dead, just as Charon, like a

vulture, waited by the sacrifice of the Trojan Captives by Achilles. Assuming the Etruscans were familiar with the practice of placing Hermes' bust atop pillars, the twist offered by the mirror's Etruscan story-teller, of substituting Pelias' image for that of Hermes (Etr. TVRMS) is fascinating.

The notion that a hero's visage atop a *herme* would convey the eternal spirit, or Veler, is sublime. This subtle twist in story-telling is often found in Etruscan mirrors. The best, perhaps, is the Divine Mirror, Script DM, which shows the entire story of Helen of Troy in three panels. In the top panel are the gods, from left to right TVRAN (Gr. Aphrodite), HERCLE (Gr. Herakles), a cherub called EPE VR, TINIA (Gr. Zeus) and his consort (with respect to Helen's story) THALNA (ΘALNA) (Gr. Nemesis, goddess of revenge, whose icon is a goose).

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

In the center panel, from left to right is AECAI, Aesacus, son of Priam by Arisbe. There is an interesting refrain from the work, "Alexandra," by Lycophron of Calchis (3rd century B.C.) that refers to the firebrand upon Troy voiced through Aesacus; MEAN, a goddess of the hunt who is probably the patron goddess of the Lydians (called *Maiones* ; Μαίονες by Herodotus) ELKINTRE, Alexander, Paris, and ELINAI, Helen of Troy, queen of Sparta, daughter of Tyndareüs. Next is MENLE, Meneleüs, who is being betrothed to Helen and ACHMEMNVN (A↓MEMNON) Agamemnon, brother of Meneleüs and king of Mycenae. The last person in the panel is LASA THIMRAE, who is probably the daughter of Priam who foretold that Paris would cause the burning, destruction of Troy. Cassandra acquired the ability to prophesy when she accidentally slept overnight in the temple of Apollo on the River Thimrae, nearby the city of Troy.

There are several twists on the story of Helen that are presented by the Etruscan story-teller here. First, Heracles had nothing to do with the Helen of Troy story. He was involved in an earlier attack against Troy. The account of Diodorus is of importance here:

Diodorus: Heracles War against Laomedon

[4.32.1] After this Heracles, returning to the Peloponnesus, made war against Ilium since he had a ground of complaint against its king, Laomedon. For when Heracles was on the expedition with Jason to get the Golden Fleece and had slain the sea-monster, Laomedon had withheld from him the mares which he had agreed to give him and of which we shall give a detailed account a little later in connection with the Argonauts.



[4.32.4] Laomedon then withdrew and joining combat with the troops of Heracles near the city he was slain himself and most of the soldiers with him. Heracles then took the city by storm and after slaughtering many of its inhabitants in the action he gave the kingdom of the Iliadae to Priam because of his sense of justice...

TVRAN, of course, was involved in the Trojan War. She was actually one of the causes of it in judging that Paris should be given the most beautiful woman in the world, who happened to have been Helen and then married to Menelaus (Re: The Judgment of Paris). The cherub may be her son Eros by Ares (Etr. Mavors, L. Mars). It was Eros that was persuaded by Aphrodite to cause Medea to fall in love with Jason.

Since it was Aphrodite that awarded Paris the hand of Helen, the action of MEAN in placing a laurel on the head of Paris (ELCHINTRE, EL↓INTRE) is shocking. For MEAN seems to have the same attributes as Artemis, and Artemis (Etr. ARTVME, ARTVMEI) is also a frequent subject in

The fascinating story-telling of Etruscan mirrors – the meaning behind 8LER

Etruscan mirrors and certainly had nothing to do with awarding Paris with the hand of Helen.

Significantly, Priam's son, Aesacus, has his arm up as if to ward off the coming evil that he knows will befall, and the other prophet, LASA THIMRAE, is leaving the scene in haste, probably saying to herself, "this is a bad deal," and carrying what appears to be a bottle for anointing. The bad deal, of course is being made by Agamemnon directly with Helen. That's not how it happened according to the Greek story. Agamemnon paid the dowry directly to Helen's father, Tyndareüs.

The connection of THALNA with the goose reminds us of the story how Zeus chased Nemesis with the intention of raping her. She changed into a goose and flew to Crete. Zeus changed into a swan and caught her there and impregnated her. She then laid an egg in a field near Sparta, where some shepherds found it and took it to Tyndareüs and his wife Leda. The egg hatched and became Helen whom Leda agreed to raise as her own. In another Etruscan mirror, we have the brothers of Helen, called the Dioscuri, Castor (Etr. CASTVR) and Polydeuces (Etr. PVLTVCEI), presenting the egg to King Tyndareüs. The names of CASTVR and PVLTVCEI are in a mirror, Script DA.¹⁴

All of the heroes in this story are dressed in garments that have the triple-dot pattern. Early images of Jesus Christ showed him dressed in garments with the triple-dot pattern, thus continuing the practice of denoting the holiness of a subject through the triple-dot pattern on garments.

Launched: 09.06.17

Updated: 09.08.17

Copyright © 2017 Mel Copeland. All rights reserved.

¹⁴ See http://www.maravot.com/Translation_ShortScripts_d.html. I apologize for the poor photo taken from the Speculum Etruscorum.