

TOMBA DEI TORI AT TARQUINIA: A RITUAL READING

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Introduction: the *Tomba dei Tori*

One of the best known, but also among the most enigmatic tombs at Tarquinia, is the so-called *Tomba dei Tori* (Tomb of the Bulls), dated to about 540–530 BC.¹ It contains a series of paintings of different thematic content including two erotic scenes, which from a modern point of view have either been ignored or considered shameless and not congruent with death and funerary practices. In this article modern morale shall not be discussed, rather funerary rituals in an Etruscan setting.

The tomb was of the tumulus type with a long, stepped *dromos* descending into the calcareous bedrock, ending in a large rectangular funerary chamber (A) (4.31 x 4.52 m, H. 2.52 m) with a saddle roof. In the back wall two doors opened into two smaller, parallel chambers, also with saddle roofs: to the left (B) (3.47 x 2.52 m, H. 2.10 m), to the right (C) (3.26 x 2.52 m, H. 2.00 m). The back wall of chamber A was decorated with four zones of paintings, one above the other, two panels (1–2) between the doors to chambers B and C, a band above the doors across the whole width of the room (3), and on top the pediment/tympanon area created by the saddle roof (4) (Fig. 1):²

1. Bottom panel (dado) (Figs 1–2): Simply sketched trees with stem and branches with and without foliage; wreaths and ribbons hang from the branches.

2. Main panel (Figs 1–2): Achilles t.l., in warrior outfit, lies in ambush behind a fountain (in ashlar masonry with two waterspouts formed as reclining lions, and a basin) for the Trojan prince Troilos, who arrives nude on horseback. A large date palm separates Troilos from Achilles and the fountain. Under the belly of the horse can be seen an irregularly painted oval with radiating short beams or dry sticks.

3. Band above the doors (Fig. 1): Two erotic scenes combined with a bull each, one above each door. The left scene is composed of a reclining bull turned left with head en face; to its right a threesome group: a woman lying on the back of a kneeling man is penetrated by a man standing to her left (Fig. 3). – In the right scene, a bull with a human face charges towards a homoerotic couple hiding behind a slender tree, the one man penetrating the other from behind (Figs 1, 4). The bull is often referred to as “Acheloos,” a Greek river god, but this is a modern denomination and

¹ Steingraber 1985, 120, 350–351 with older literature; Holloway 1986; Rizzo 1989, 124–126; Haynes 2000, 222–223.

² The description is made from the point of the viewer, if not otherwise signaled. – For references to other Etruscan tombs mentioned in the text, see the catalogue descriptions made by Steingraber 1985.

should not be used in this Etruscan context, where equipping a bull with a human face may have been the result of a funerary ideology not compatible with the life and functions of the Greek mythical figure. – Between the two groups an inscription (Fig. 2) – *Araz siqetenas spurianas* – gives the name of the owner of the tomb, Arath Spuriana,³ possibly(?) an early member of the later well-known and powerful Spurinna family at Tarquinia.⁴

4. Pediment (Fig. 1): On either side of the painted ridge pole with rams' heads, in the middle Bellerophon on Pegasus (right side) (Fig. 4) attacks the Chimera (on the left side) (Fig. 3); behind the Chimera a reclining sphinx, behind Bellerophon a running bull.

None of the other walls in the tomb are painted, except for the pediments in all rooms.⁵

Chamber A, entrance wall: From left: Marine dog, flying duck, *hippocamp* with naked rider moving towards the centre filled with a rocky landscape with plants, on either side of the ridge beam, perhaps an island ("Island of the Blessed"); on the other side (badly preserved) two ducks near the corner; sea waves.

Chamber B, entrance wall: On either side of the ridge beam a running bull with frontal face.

Chamber B, back wall: To the left of the central ridge beam a heraldic panther with frontal head, and a duck; to the right of the beam, a lion.

Chamber C, entrance wall: On the left of the ridge beam an animal fight, lion vs. ibex; on the right a reclining ibex.

Chamber C, back wall: On either side of the ridge beam a heraldic *hippocamp*; a duck behind the left one.

³ Pfiffig 1972; 28–29, no. 11.

⁴ Torelli 1975, 56–57.

⁵ For sketch drawings of the following pediments, see Holloway 1986, ill. 2–6 (retrievable online to JSTOR subscribers at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/506031>).



Figure One *Tomba dei Tori*, Tarquinia; chamber A, rear wall with the doors into respectively the chambers B (to the left) and C (to the right). Reproduced with kind permission of American Academy in Rome, Photographic Archive; photo Moscioni no. 7065.

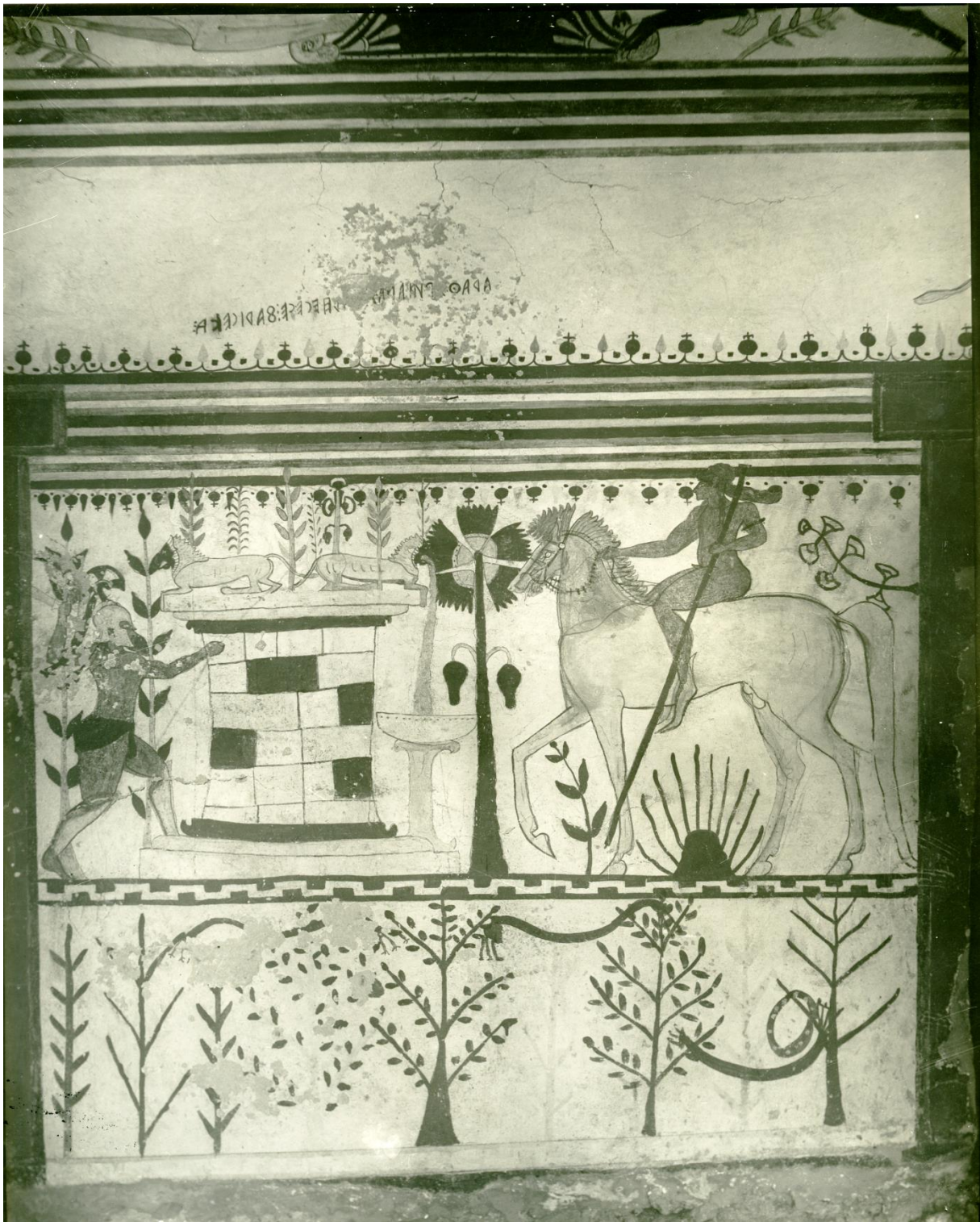


Figure Two *Tomba dei Tori*, Tarquinia; chamber A, central part of the rear wall: dado below, Achilles and Troilos in the middle, the name inscription above. Reproduced with kind permission of American Academy in Rome, Photographic Archive; photo Moscioni no. 24122.



Figure Three *Tomba dei Tori*, Tarquinia; chamber A, upper part of the left side of the rear wall: erotic threesome group below, reclining sphinx and Chimera in the pediment above. Reproduced with kind permission of American Academy in Rome, Photographic Archive; photo Moscioni no. 24121.



Figure Four *Tomba dei Tori*, Tarquinia; chamber A, upper part of the right side of the rear wall: bull with a human face charging towards a homoerotic couple below, Bellerophon on Pegasos and a running bull in the pediment above. Reproduced with kind permission of American Academy in Rome, Photographic Archive; photo Moscioni no. 24118.

Previous research and a new approach

Many interpretations have been forwarded especially for the scenes in panels 2 and 3 in chamber A, some of them concerned with the paintings' decorative effects,⁶ or with iconographical details and the relation between Greek texts and the mythical motif,⁷ few moving from there to an iconological level of interpretation. In more recent years, attempts have been made to put Etruscan tomb paintings into a funerary context,⁸ but with more concern put on the organization and position of certain pictorial themes on the walls of the tombs, than their relation to funerary rites proper. However, the concept passage rite has been forwarded in connection with some pictorial themes, and there is to-day a stronger awareness that the pictorial motifs in Etruscan tombs are related to funerary actions.⁹ What makes an interpretation difficult is that no two Etruscan tombs are alike; they may contain similar thematic pictorial motifs, but always in new versions and often in new combinations and contexts within the tomb. In addition, the Etruscan pictorial world is characterized by a synoptic or acronymistic narrative style, which means that the number of iconographical elements is heavily reduced in order to impart a message to the viewer. Most often a motif carries a meaning, but not necessarily always so; a motif can at times have a mainly decorative function, the difficulty lies in deciding when.

In a recent article, I have tried to read Etruscan tomb paintings as part of a ritual procedure, seen both from the view of the living and from that of the deceased. My point of departure is the concept passage rite, or rather the model for such rites, as forwarded by Arnold van Gennep (1908 [1960]) as an interpretative tool in connection with religious celebrations. For the Archaic and Classical periods (6th – early/mid 4th century BC) 13 thematic motifs (called parameters) were singled out that could be found in the paintings in three or more tombs, and arranged more or less chronologically as they appeared in the tombs:¹⁰

A. Heraldic birds and animals; animal battle scenes in a heraldic setting; Gorgoneia.

B. Subjects alluding to sea/water: dolphins, hippocamps, Tritons, waves.

C. Closed doors.

D. Unconventional scenes: erotic scenes, scenes with reference to laughter, purification sacrifices.

E. Banquets, often accompanied by music.

F. Dances, most often accompanied by music.

G. Scenes with blood, visible and potentially visible: Phersu, flogging, boxers, wrestlers, warriors, fights, and killings.

H. Athletic games (excluding boxers and wrestlers: see parameter G), and chariot races.

I. Ritual objects: *thymiateria* and oversized kylikes.

⁶ Banti 1955/56, 165.

⁷ Simon 1973; Jannot 1974; Oleson 1975, who sums up the discussion; Holloway 1986; for oral story telling see, Spivey & Stoddart 1990, 92–106; Heedren 2001, 3–12; 2012.

⁸ Torelli 1997a; 1997b; 1999, all of basically the same content; though see, also the interesting observations by Holloway 1986, an article often overlooked.

⁹ Cristofani 1989, 27; Spivey & Stoddart 1990, 110–120; Prayon 2004; Leighton 2004, 113–121; Krauskopf 2006; Fiorini 2007; Weber-Lehmann 2012.

¹⁰ Brandt 2014b, 113, 161. The description of the parameters is here presented in a slightly abbreviated version, concentrating on the elements valid for *Tomba dei Tori*.

J. Horsemen (excluding mythical contexts and hunting scenes).

K. Hunting scenes.

L. Prothesis and related scenes.

M. Weapon (or Pyrrhic) dances.

If we can presume, as already inferred, that the pictorial motifs in Etruscan funerary paintings refer to funerary rituals, these rituals may be those which were performed from the moment of death to after the interment of the deceased, whether the body was inhumed or cremated. This means during the period when, following Arnold van Gennep's model on passage rites, both the deceased and the participants in the funerary ceremony for a given time found themselves in the liminal phase of transition, between the phase of separation (the moment of death) and the phase of reintegration (after the interment of the deceased).¹¹ In funerary rites this transitional phase was the most critical, during which all participating members normally found themselves temporarily suspended from normal social life;¹² they were in a border land in which strong powers and dangers were released and in which abnormal activities connected to dirt, obscenities, and lawlessness symbolically were just as relevant for the performance of the rites as were more normal actions.¹³

According to van Gennep, "those funeral rites which incorporate the deceased into the world of the dead are most extensively elaborated and assigned the greatest importance."¹⁴ Since the Etruscans appear to have been much concerned about the afterlife, it may not come as a surprise that most tomb paintings and sculpture refer to this critical transitional phase.

The moment of death triggered a set of social mechanisms and funerary actions in which the deceased should be honoured according to his/her social standing and merits. At the same time the corpse became a source of pollution, which had to be counteracted with rituals of purification,¹⁵ and measures had to be taken in order to help the deceased, or rather the deceased's soul, on its journey to the other world. Accordingly, in this liminal phase the funerary actions were of a threefold nature: honouring of the dead, alleviation of the deceased's journey to the Underworld, and purification of the funerary celebrants.

The parameters listed above may thus be divided into three funerary physical and mental spheres:¹⁶

1. The liminal celebrations: death, honour, and afterlife (parameters B, C, H, J, K, L, M)
2. The liminal journey: actions and counteractions (parameters A, D, F, G)
3. The liminal conclusion: purification and reintegration (parameters E, I)

The division is artificial; it was not organized as such in the minds of the Etruscans. The parameters and their meaning are separated into modern, virtual compartments in an attempt to discover some sort of organizational pattern in the use of the pictorial motifs – and through this pattern discover the Etruscan view on death and the meaning of their funerary practices as conveyed through art expressions. – With this tool in hand we can now approach the

¹¹ Van Gennep 1908 [1960, 146]; Morris 1992, 8–10; Cristofani 1987, 192; 1989, 27; Spivey & Stoddart 1990, 116–117; Torelli 1999, 152, 156–157; Weber-Lehmann 2004a, 124; Krauskopf 2006, 74–75.

¹² Van Gennep 1908 [1960, 148].

¹³ Douglas 1966 [2002, 119–121].

¹⁴ Van Gennep 1908 [1960, 147].

¹⁵ Douglas 1966 [2002]; Cole 2004, 30–37, 105–106; Brandt 2012; 2014a.

¹⁶ Brandt 2014b, 114.

interpretation of the pictorial scenes in *Tomba dei Tori*. Only the first two liminal situations, celebrations and journey, will be of current interest.

A ritual reading, 1. The liminal celebrations: death, honour, and afterlife

The pictorial themes in this first group of parameters refer to the deceased (parameters K and L), to the celebrations of the deceased (parameters H and M), to the tomb (parameter C), and the journey to the Underworld (parameters B and J).

Among these scenes only parameter B is represented in *Tomba dei Tori*, in the pediment above the entrance into chamber A, as described above: From left a marine dog, a flying duck,¹⁷ a *hippocamp* with a nude rider move towards the centre, which is filled with a rocky landscape and plants, perhaps the “Island of the Blessed;” from right only two approaching ducks are preserved. The motif refers to the journey made by the deceased on his/her way to the Underworld.¹⁸ The Greeks had to cross the river Styx to arrive at Hades; Acheron, giving name to the *Acherontic* Books (containing the *sacra Acheruntia* or the Etruscan “Rituals of the Underworld”),¹⁹ was the name of one of the major rivers of the Etruscan Underworld. Apparently, in both cultures the crossing of water was considered as part of the approach to the world of the dead, but the way a Greek or an Etruscan crossed these waters may not have been the same. The journey is here shown in a rather explicit way, including also its goal, a rocky piece of land. Parameter B, which is the only parameter to be found in Etruscan tomb paintings all through the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods, is normally given a much more synoptic treatment, often only as a band of stylized waves.

A ritual reading, 2. The liminal journey: actions and counteractions

In the first group of parameters we found a reference to the deceased’s journey to the Underworld. What happened in this journey of the dead the Archaic and Classical tomb paintings do not reveal – instead the paintings show some of the doings that the living funerary celebrants had established to help the deceased on his/her journey, counteracting dangers and fears, or actions they believed were set loose at the time of death. *Tomba dei Tori* contains perhaps as many as three of the four parameters connected to this part of the funerary rituals (parameters A, D, and G).

Let us start with parameter A referring to a first set of counteractions:²⁰ Heraldic birds and animals are found in all six pediment decorations of the tomb: a sphinx, a lion, a panther, bulls, and ibices. The resting bull in the band above the doors in the back wall of chamber A, may belong to the same sphere (Figs 1, 3–4). Animals are often used as metaphors for apotropaic powers;²¹ they were in this function presumably considered both as guardians of the tomb and of the deceased, not only in a generic way, but perhaps in particular as protectors against the strong transcendental powers and dangers which were released at the moment of death. In this way they helped the deceased’s soul on its journey to the Underworld. The scene with Bellerophon on Pegasus fighting the Chimera in the pediment in the back wall of chamber A may be considered as an explicit reference to this protective role, where the Chimera is used as a metaphor for the transcendental powers.²²

¹⁷ In Brandt 2014b, 113, I considered birds as part of parameter A, but the non-flying birds often present in the pediments may be intended as ducks or other types of water-birds, thus perhaps referring to parameter B.

¹⁸ Boosen 1986, 58–63, 129–133, 177–182, 217–222, 232; Hostetter 1986, 22–23; Holloway 1986, 452; Krauskopf 1987, 14, notes 4–6; Jannot 1998, 76–78; Haynes 2000, 223.

¹⁹ Jannot 1998, 71–88; de Grummond 2006, 209–233.

²⁰ Notice the adjusted definition of this parameter in relation to Brandt 2014b, 123.

²¹ Cristofani 1978, 72–73; Roncalli 2000, 349, 351; Izzet 2007, 93, 98.

²² We have no reference to such Etruscan forces, but forces dwelling in the liminal space, as described by Vergil, *Aenid* 6.273–294, include: War, Disease, Anxiety, Grief, Fear, Discord, Poverty, Hunger, and others (Krauskopf 2006, 75). Could they be a fossilized picture of an earlier Etruscan view of undesirable real and abstract forces?

Apotropaic animals were perhaps not considered enough to protect the deceased's soul from the actions of the transcendental powers; the powers also had to be counteracted by the funerary celebrants themselves. Here we may find an explanation for the presence of at least one unconventional scene (parameter D) in our tomb: the erotic groups in the band above the doors (3) in the back wall of chamber A (Figs 1, 3–4). Erotic scenes, which we find in more Etruscan tomb paintings,²³ may seem out of context in a funerary situation, but their meaning was not connected to the intercourse actions in themselves, rather to the effect they had on the performers' state of mind at the moment of orgasm. At that particular moment are released forces in the body, which bring the performers into a transcendental space outside him-/herself, where he/she may come in contact with transcendental forces with which the safe journey of the dead soul could be negotiated and defended. Ecstatic dancing (parameter F), a recurrent theme in Etruscan tomb paintings, and intense, hysterical laughter (parameter D) were other ways of getting into contact with the other world, and it should not be excluded that originally all three acts, laughter, dancing, and sexual play, spontaneously or ritually organized, made up part of the Etruscan funerary ritual.²⁴

In *Tomba dei Tori*, the charging bull with a human face, in the pictorial band above the doors in the back wall of chamber A (Figs 1, 4), could well be a metaphor of the transcendental forces to be checked, in the same way as the Chimera in the pediment above. In the pediment the Chimera was fought by the hero Bellerophon, a god-favoured person who already operated in a world outside that of the living; in the pictorial band the charging transcendental force was checked by the erotic groups, but in the world of the living). The artist has given the scene above the right door a humorous touch by letting the homoerotic couple hide from the fury of the bull behind a slender tree, thus underlining the extreme power of the transcendental forces. In addition, in this couple may also be transferred a situation of pollution, a condition often created in the disorderly liminal space. According to later Roman views on pollution, if they can be applied here, anal penetration did not affect the penetrator, but may have put the penetrated into a polluted state.²⁵

The bull and symplegma groups are placed right above the doors to chambers B and C. From a pictorial composition point of view this is a good solution, but their position may also have carried a deeper significance. Since both scenes regard the protection of the deceased's soul from transcendental forces on its way to the Underworld, they express at the same time, in a conveyed meaning, a protection of the rooms behind the doors.

The Acherontic Books, referred to above, promised, according to the late Roman author Arnobius (*Adversus Nationes* 2.62), "that by the blood of certain animals, divine souls (*animae*) become endowed with certain numinous spirits and they would be led away from the laws of mortality." In other words, a blood sacrifice was able to give immortality to dead souls (parameter G).²⁶

No tomb paintings display an animal (nor a human) sacrifice, but in some tombs the presence of *thymiateria*, or incense burners (parameter I), used for purification, an important act in connection with sacrifices, implies that animal sacrifices constituted a practice in the

On the Chimera, see, for example, Terrosi Zanco 1964. – Holloway 1986 refers to the "Evil Eye," which is not totally incongruent with my use of the term transcendental forces.

²³ See, in addition, Tomba delle Leonesse, Tomba dei Baccanti, Tomba dei Vasi Dipinti, Tomba della Fustigazione, Tomba delle Bighe, and Tomba 4260.

²⁴ Brandt 2014b, 123–125, 128–136.

²⁵ Cf. Clarke 1998, 84–87, 2007, 102, 208, who, however, is less explicit on this point. Could the woman-like carnation of the penetrated man, making him different, be a signal of his abnormal social status with a possible reference to his polluted state?

²⁶ De Grummond 2006, 209–210.

funerary celebrations.²⁷ However, if no animal blood sacrifice has been recorded in the tomb paintings, scenes with the flowing of human blood are not infrequent, as in some scenes with boxers/wrestlers,²⁸ in an erotic flogging scene (*Tomba della Fustigazione*), and in ferocious games led by a masked person named Phersu;²⁹ and in a late decapitation and combat scene (*Tomba François*). The armed, blood-running combats, visible in tomb paintings from the 4th century BC (mainly) found in Lucania in S-Italy, most likely belong to the same cognitive world.³⁰ Could such blood thirsty scenes have served the same purpose as the animal sacrifices, to give immortality to the deceased's soul?³¹ At death the blood stops running; flowing blood in a ritual context would thus be a symbol of life. Tertullian's observation that "... earlier, since it was believed that the spirits of the dead could be appeased with human blood, they used at funerals to sacrifice prisoners of war or slaves of poor quality..." (*De spectaculis* 12), may be a reflection of this kind of thinking. The use of the Troilos scene in *Tomba dei Tori* may be another reflection of the same or similar kind (Figs 1–2).³²

The myth of Achilles, who in an ambush killed the Trojan prince Troilos, was a very popular motif in Etruscan art in the Archaic period,³³ and it is described in the *Kypria*.³⁴ It was said that the Greeks could not win at Troy if the younger brother of Hector and Paris should reach the age of 20 years. His elimination was therefore of utmost importance for the Greeks. Achilles took upon himself the deed, hid behind a fountain and killed the prince when he came to give water to his horses.³⁵ In a funerary context Troilos has been regarded as the embodiment of a dead child mourned by his parents,³⁶ alternatively as a reference to the cruelty of death,³⁷ or as an exaltation of the excellence of a warrior, his *areté* and his smartness, *metis*.³⁸ Were any of these explanations the reason for his portrayal here? I doubt so; the use of the myth in a funerary context had a different ideological meaning, which may be better understood through a new detailed reading of the painting seen in relation to the other pictures in the tomb. Troilos' death did not serve as an attribute or allegory of the fate of the deceased, rather as a metaphor of a funerary ritual.

From left Achilles in warrior outfit dashes forward from behind a fountain to kill the approaching nude prince on horseback. His death is imminent. The scene, different from other pictorial presentations, is divided in two halves by a large date palm. The palm, together with the frequent use of laurel trees(?) in the picture places the atrocious killing at the grove of Apollo Thymbraios by the Skamander river at Troy,³⁹ but at the same time it divides the painting into two spaces, that of the living to the left with Achilles and that of the soon dead-to-be with Troilos to the right. Could it be that the painter of the tomb, in a synoptic way,

²⁷ Ambrosini 2002, 59–96. See Tomba dei Giocolieri, Tomba delle Bighe, Tomba del Biclinio, all at Tarquinia, and Tomba della Scimmia, at Chiusi.

²⁸ Jannot 1998, 66.

²⁹ Bomati 1986; Jannot 1993; Emmanuel-Rebuffat 1997; Avramidou 2009. See Phersu's presence in Tomba degli Auguri, Tomba delle Olimpiadi, Tomba della Pulcinella, and perhaps in Tomba 1999 at Tarquinia, and in Tomba della Scimmia, at Chiusi.

³⁰ Pontrandolfo & Rouveret 1992, 54–58, 68.

³¹ Jannot 1998, 67.

³² Brandt 2014b, 127.

³³ Schauenburg 1970, 59–81; Prayon 1977; Heedren 2012.

³⁴ Evelyn-White 1914, 495, frg. 1.

³⁵ Sketch lines in the tomb painting show that a second horse was considered as a part of the composition, but was in the end eliminated (De Wit 1929).

³⁶ See, for example, Rebuffat 1972, 517.

³⁷ Schauenburg 1970, 60.

³⁸ As, for example, Rizzo 1989, 126.

³⁹ Simon 1973, 28; see also Oleson 1975, 192–93. Steingraber 1985, 350–351, does not give a name to the trees with the exception of the palm. According to Jannot 2009, 82, laurel is very frequent in Etruscan paintings and sculpture, but may not be evidence of an Apollo cult as it "alludes clearly to ritual purification before death," more in line with its repeated use in a funerary context as in the present tomb.

tries to tell us two stories in one and the same painting, one related to the myth, the other related to its present funerary context? Under the belly of the horse is seen a slightly irregular shaped object with radiant “rays,” which is a unique element in a figural presentation of the myth. It has been suggested that it depicts the setting sun,⁴⁰ giving the time of the day when the ambush happened. A setting sun (not in the shape of Helios) would, as an iconographical element, be a unique presentation in both Etruscan and Greek art.⁴¹ Should we rather read the irregular oval shape as a rock and the rays as barren, leafless trees? In that case it could be interpreted as a boundary marker, the marker between the world of the living and the liminal world beyond. Sisyphos, as punishment for his *hybris*, had to roll a rock up a mountain in the other world, a mountain which became regarded as the boundary between the worlds of life and of death. The rock reappears about 100 years later in the right side wall of *Tomba dei Demoni Azzurri* as a large extended bleak mountain on which many death demons are active,⁴² and again in a Hellenistic sarcophagus as a small rock on the ground.⁴³ The barren trees on the rock in *Tomba dei Tori* should then be seen as a figurative sign of the barren liminal landscape that the deceased had to pass through on his way to the Underworld.

The painting in this way tries to tell the viewer both about the ambush myth in itself, but also its result, the journey of the dead hero to the Underworld. To this second story can be added another element, the horse, or rather Troilos as a horseman. Horsemen (parameter J) are claimed to be “the traditional Etruscan allegorical representation of the voyage to the Underworld,”⁴⁴ and their appearance in *Tomba del Barone* is a good example of their role as death journey escorts.⁴⁵ The riding Troilos follows the myth as it is told, but in the second funerary story he becomes the horseman who accompanies the dead, who here actually accompanies himself on the journey in the liminal world on the way to the Underworld. Or should we rather see him in that function as the escort of the deceased for whom the tomb was made?⁴⁶

In this play of spaces and settings between life and death, myth and reality appear also as important elements. The killing of Troilos caused bloodshed, but the killing is not portrayed as a simple killing – rather as a human sacrifice.⁴⁷ Achilles is not armed with a normal sword used in battles, but with a *machaira*, a sacrificial knife,⁴⁸ and the fountain with its lion waterspouts on top is not shaped as a water post, rather as an altar. The central scene of the painting could thus refer to a funerary practice in which a human sacrifice was included as an ingredient. Tertullian’s words cited above may accordingly have referred, in a near or distant past, to a situation closer to reality than readily acceptable. Alternatively, the painted scene in *Tomba dei Tori* did not refer to a human sacrifice in itself, but in a transferred meaning to bloodshed in one way or the other (as already observed above), as an integrated part of Etruscan funerary practices.

A ritual reading, 3. Van Gennep and the Etruscan world beyond

The choice of paintings in *Tomba dei Tori* can be associated with four out of the thirteen parameters referring to funerary ritual procedures listed in the introduction (parameters A, B, D, and G). In their presentation on the back wall of chamber A they are tied together in a

⁴⁰ Oleson 1975, 193–196; cf. also Prayon 1977, 182.

⁴¹ See also the critical comments by Holloway 1986, 448.

⁴² On the tomb, see, Cataldi Dini 1987; 1989; Adinolfi, Carmagnola & Cataldi 2005a; 2005b.

⁴³ Roncalli 1996; 1997; De Grummond 2006, 212–213, 218, fig. X.11.

⁴⁴ Torelli 1997a, 130; 1997b, 70; 1999, 150.

⁴⁵ Brandt 2014b, 118–19.

⁴⁶ Cf. note 35: Could it be that the artist in the second sketched horse had the accompanying horseman in mind, but in a second thought decided to eliminate it, since it in that way would have “disturbed” the Troilos story?

⁴⁷ Camporeale, G. 2009, 18 (with further refs); Hedreen 2012, 137 n. 14.

⁴⁸ Cerchiai 1980, 26.

uniform composition which starts from the bottom dado scene (1): the painting of simply sketched trees with stem and branches with and without leaves, decorated by wreaths and ribbons. The decoration of trees with ribbons and wreaths at funerals is part of a long tradition, surviving in some Mediterranean societies even to-day, as for example, in Turkey. The trees with and without leaves, perhaps referring respectively to this world and the liminal world beyond, intimate thus that the theme of the paintings in the panels above will play on the balance between these two worlds.

In fact, from the way the panels are built up emerges a clear picture of how the Etruscans by the second half of the 6th c. BC visualized the transfer of the deceased's soul from the world of the living to that of the dead. It was a transition in three stages which happened in three distinct spaces, and as laid out the paintings could well serve as an illustration of van Gennep's passage rite model:⁴⁹

1. The phase of separation – which happens in the space of this world (panel 2), here transferred to a historical past to give the funerary procedures a stronger legitimacy. The separation lies hidden in the imminent moment of Troilos' death, pictorially underlined by the central palm, which divides the pictorial space into two – one for the living assassin Achilles, another for Troilos literally on the threshold of death, the threshold marked by the boundary rock with barren trees under the horse's belly. By this transgression Troilos' soul, as a metaphor for the deceased's soul and as a horseman protector, passes into

2. The phase of transition – which happens in the liminal space of the death journey after the moment of death and before the deceased's soul has reached the Underworld (panel 3). In this space were set loose evil transcendental forces (represented by the "Acheloos" faced bull here and the Chimera in the pediment (panel 4)), making the journey of the soul difficult and dangerous. The funerary celebrants, participating in the transition phase, could ease the journey of the soul by performing blood sacrifices (an implicit part of the Troilos story), or by getting into a mental contact with these forces through ecstatic dancing, intense laughter, or (as here) orgasm in erotic plays. The protection of the soul was also achieved through the presence of heraldic animals spread out both in panel 3 (the resting bull) and in the pediment (panel 4), where also the hero Bellerophon gave a hand in fighting the evil forces. – The pomegranates hanging from the top border of panel 2 and rising from the bottom border of panel 3, are a rarity in Etruscan tomb paintings.⁵⁰ Since they here are only associated with the actions of the living, in them may be hidden another symbolic protection of the deceased's soul in its liminal journey.⁵¹ – Having successfully arrived at the doorsteps of the Underworld, the soul, as well as the funerary celebrants could now move into

3. The phase of reintegration – which happens in the space of the Underworld where the soul is welcomed by his ancestors with a joyous meal. Likewise the funerary celebrants celebrate the event with a banquet (not represented in the present tomb), which marked the end of the

⁴⁹ Cf. also Brandt 2014b, 113–114, 149.

⁵⁰ Otherwise only present in the slightly earlier painted funerary Bocanera terracotta plates from Cerveteri (Haynes 2000, 217–219, fig. 178) and in the later Tomba Golini I at Orvieto.

⁵¹ Cf. Muthmann 1982, 77.

funerary procedures and followed after the moment when the deceased had been put to rest in her/his tomb and the celebrants had been purified of funerary pollution. The goal of the liminal journey is indicated in the other pediment of chamber A in the rocky landscape in the middle of the pediment, but not the arrival proper. In this space only the deceased's soul could enter, not the funerary celebrants. – The meal signaled the end of the funerary ceremony and the return of the celebrants back into society from their liminal situation, when they were temporarily suspended from normal social life. The importance of the meal is conveyed through the position of the pictorial motif in the tomb and in the number of its occurrences in Etruscan tomb paintings. It is always presented on the back wall of the tomb, the most important wall,⁵² and it is second (present in 56 tombs) only to the heraldic animals (parameter A: present in 89 tombs), the most popular motif.⁵³ In *Tomba dei Tori* this conclusion of the funerary procedures was not considered.

There are reasons to believe that this Etruscan death model was not an import from Greece, but a model which had developed out of the Etruscans' own visions of life and life after death.⁵⁴ In *Tomba dei Tori* we find for the first and only time the use of a specific Greek myth in an Etruscan tomb painting, but slightly adjusted to harmonize better with the Etruscan funerary practices. In later tombs the pictorial motifs belong nearly without exception to the Etruscan funerary ritual world.

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⁵² Torelli 1997a, 143; 1997b, 82; 1999, 155.

⁵³ Brandt 2014b, 144, table 5.1.

⁵⁴ Brandt 2014b, 148–53.

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Latin summary

De “Tomba dei Tori”, sepulcro Tarquiniae sito: lectio ritualis. In libro quodam recentissimo (Brandt 2014b) conamen factum est recipere exempla imaginea iterata, quae in picturis sepulcrorum Etruscorum inveniuntur, atque eos ut elementa actionum ritualium funebrium interpretari hoc conamine respiciens ad Arnoldi van Gennep typum “rituum transitoriorum” (1908) et ad Mariae Douglas perceptiones puritatis periculique (1996). Talis typus hic adhibetur ad sepulcrum archaicum atque bene notum inspiciendum, quod “Tomba dei Tori” appellatur et Tarquiniae situm est, ut spectetur, num illae sepulcri scaenae imagineae aenigmaticae legi possunt tamquam elementa cohaerentia huiusmodi actionum.

English summary

In a recent publication (Brandt 2014b) an attempt was made to single out recurring pictorial motifs in Etruscan tomb paintings and to interpret them as elements of funerary ritual procedures with reference to Arnold van Gennep’s rites-de-passage model (1908) and Mary Douglas’ views on purity and danger (1996). The model is here applied on the Archaic and well-known Tomba dei Tori at Tarquinia in order to see if the tomb’s many enigmatic pictorial scenes can be read as coherent elements of such procedures.

Keywords

Blood, danger, Etruscan tomb painting, liminality, purity, rites-de-passage, Tarquinia, transcendental forces, Underworld.