

L. Bouke van der Meer (ed.), *Material Aspects of Etruscan Religion: Proceedings of the International Colloquium Leiden, May 29 and 30, 2008. BABesch Annual Papers on Mediterranean Archaeology, Supplement 16.* Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010. Pp. vii, 164. ISBN 9789042923669. €65.00 (pb).

**Reviewed by Jean MacIntosh Turfa, University of Pennsylvania Museum
(jturfa@sas.upenn.edu)**

This volume is a subset of the papers actually delivered at the Leiden conference. Camporeale and Torelli could not attend but furnished papers; two doctoral students presented papers not published here (see Natalie L.C. Stevens, "A New Reconstruction of the Etruscan Heaven," *AJA* 113, 2009, 153-164.)

A materially-oriented work such as this is a sort of ground-truthing of ancient Mediterranean religion, a fine supplement to literature that often relies extravagantly on textual and epigraphic sources. Case studies cover selected material in great depth, but naturally do not substitute for general works on Etruscan religion.¹ The *BABesch* format is clear, with endnotes, bibliography and generous illustrations in each article.

Editor van der Meer's introduction is a *histoire raisonnée* of the development of Etruscan sacred material culture, beginning with the emergence of funeral rituals and natural shrines in the Protovillanovan period. By the early 7th century BC, contact with Levantine and Greek immigrants resulted in monumental architecture. Across Etruria, stone altars, permanent sanctuaries and the anthropomorphic representation of gods developed in close association. A transition in funerary belief occurred late in the 5th century as banquet scenes gave way to the Underworld. From the 5th to 2nd centuries, the phenomenon of terracotta anatomical votive offerings marks a new spirit of *Volksreligion*, while written sources betray an increasingly hierarchical development of the Etruscan pantheon, and of pan-Etruscan sanctuaries, crowned by the *fanum Voltumnae*.²

Maria Bonghi Jovino, "Tarquinia. Types of Offerings, Etruscan Divinities and Attributes in the Archaeological Record" (5- 16), interprets evidence from the excavations of Tarquinia Pian di Civita (10th through 2nd c. BC) for evidence of continuity of cult, suggesting that the original goddess was Artemis, and that focus then shifted to Uni, paralleling the political evolution of Tarquinia. Precocious adoption of Levantine architectural techniques and patterns, such as pier-and-panel masonry walls (Edificio Beta, 700-650 BC), is taken as corroborating eastern stimuli on the cult.³

Gods are identified based on the character of the votives and ample doses of *Greek* literature: in the absence of Etruscan literature, interpretations cannot be verified. A bucchero vase inscribed *mi Uni* demonstrates one recipient of the cult ca. 600 BC. Fig. 1 (p. 6) while small, is a rare map showing both the Civita complex and the sanctuary at the Ara della Regina, so one can see the size of the city and the distance between the two. (An aerial photo with both

sites marked appears as fig. 2, p. 163, of Bonghi Jovino's field report, "The Tarquinia Project: A Summary of 25 Years of Excavation," *AJA* 114 (2010) 161-180.)

Giuseppe Sassatelli and Elisabetta Govi discuss "Cults and Foundation Rites in the Etruscan City of Marzabotto" (17-27). The short-lived settlement (perhaps Etruscan "Newtown", according to a vase dedicated *kainuathi*, "at Kainua") offers fine evidence of Etruscan cosmological beliefs expressed in orthogonal orientation using cardinal and solstice points to imitate the pattern of the *sedes deorum*, elaborated in an 8-part division. Four *cippi*, one marked with cross-hairs, were placed under main crossroads. Although many altars and shrines were concentrated on the acropolis (along with a now-lost feature restored as an *auguraculum* platform), the peripteral Temple of Tina, identified by inscribed bucchero vases, was an essential part of the urban fabric.

Eight-part divisions were also detected in the plan of the seashore sanctuary at Gravisca, which included a cult of Adonis with its "tomb" related to the summer solstice by Lucio Fiorino and Mario Torelli, "Quarant'anni di ricerche a Gravisca" (29-49). The cult at Gravisca was deeply affected by the fortunes of the local (port) economy, and only the Adonis cult is said to have been revived after the Roman destruction of 281 BC.⁴ Torelli disagrees with some of Alan Johnston's conservative interpretations of the Gravisca votive inscriptions (*Gravisca* vol. 15, 22-26 n. 117, 72 n. 397), seeing low-class or servile worshippers both Greek and Etruscan, and restoring one inscription as a Greek slave making the dedication for his master "Pa[troklos]." He reads the 4th-c. dedication (with surname in genitive case) of *Ramtha Venatres* as "indication of the status of a slave rather than a wife" and advances the suggestion of sacred prostitution at Gravisca as well as Pyrgi (but see for a reality-check, S.L. Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2008, 247-254.) Two Greek graffiti (*[h]ieron*) on bucchero vases might be interpreted as less affluent Greeks using local wares, but bucchero was not a poor man's fabric either.

Stephan Steingraber and Silvia Menichelli, "Etruscan Altars in Sanctuaries and Necropoleis of the Orientalizing, Archaic and Classical Periods" (51-74), provide a typological inventory of Etruscan altars, linking the designs to funerary, chthonic, water-, or hero-cults.⁵ The paper expands upon Menichelli's article "Etruscan Altars from the 7th to the 4th centuries B.C.," *Etruscan Studies* 12 (2009) 99-129: illustrations and maps are now in color and labeled in English. Although her "List of monuments examined" (121) is not reprised here, her prose "List of Examined Altars" (68-71), duplicates that in *Etruscan Studies* (122-126) but omits Fiesole, and restores the exact letter-designations of altars at Gravisca and Pyrgi that had been dropped from the earlier article. (Menichelli's overview of this material has appeared as "Religione e ritualità: L'altare nel mondo etrusco. La disciplina etrusca al cospetto degli altari," *Forma Urbis* 14:10 [2009] 24-35.) Steingraber adds a description of a recently discovered (2006) grotto-sanctuary at Vetralla frequented from the 3rd c. BC to the 2nd c. AD. Finds such as terracotta uteri and a statuette of a seated goddess *in situ* in a naiskos led to identification with Demeter-Vei-Ceres; an altar has a channel for blood to drain into the earth.

Friedhelm Prayon "The Tomb as Altar" (75-82), noting several recent excavations, indicates the evidence of rituals of ancestor cult from the 7th century on, with tombs conceived as altars. He interprets ditches surrounding Caeretan tumuli, spanned by ramps with false doors, arches etc. as a boundary between life and afterlife. Prayon notes that Tumulus II at Cerveteri was originally built (for the Tomb of the Hut) with such a ramp, but was remodeled with a new version of this structure, 150 years later – emphasizing a continuity of belief over multiple generations.

Maurizio Harari, “The Imagery of the Etrusco-Faliscan Pantheon Between Architectural Sculpture and Vase-painting” (83-103), finds a wealth of evidence for the evolution of cults at 4th-c. Falerii Veteres in terracotta architectural sculptures interpreted through reference to Faliscan red-figured vase-painting and to recent archival and archaeological research. He warns us that famous pieces, such as the Pheidian “Santangelo head” and the Apollo torso from Scasato Temples II and I are artificially stranded by publication gaps and sensationalizing display tactics at the Villa Giulia. They are not isolated finds but part of a rich repertoire of temple façades.⁶ Fernando Gilotta offers a different type of analysis, dissecting a red-figured column krater in order to follow “A Journey to Hades with Turms Aitas” (105-115). The late 5th-c. vase now in Chiusi probably came from a necropolis at Bettolle. A bearded man dressed for travel is assisted by Turms Aitas, the Hermes of Hades. Other vases from this workshop also seem to have been made (with unglazed interiors) not for banquet use but as cinerary urns reflecting the cosmopolitan cults followed by the families who commissioned them and were followers of Demeter, Aphrodite, or Dionysos.

Francesco Roncalli’s analysis, “Between Divination and Magic: Role, Gesture and Instruments of the Etruscan Haruspex” (117-126), extends his past research on the native, pastoral background of the official’s costume, adding more evidence in the vein of *ex oriente lux*. There are early Babylonian and Assyrian precedents for the practice of lekanomancy as well as divination by sheep liver. One issue in the study of Etruscan haruspicy, so famous from the 1st c. BC to the end of the Roman empire, is the seemingly late appearance of its physical evidence (the Piacenza liver, for instance, was inscribed ca. 100 BC), but Roncalli traces it into the 6th c. BC; the antique fibula on the priest’s fleece cloak reaches into the Iron Age.

Claus Ambos and Ingrid Krauskopf, “The Curved Staff in the Near East as a Predecessor of the Etruscan *lituus*” (127-153), note significant Anatolian evidence – the number and detail of Hittite and related representations is striking. The shepherd’s crook was imitated in a purely symbolic, exaggerated version displayed by rulers and priests, and was transferred to Italy in both form and symbolic function. In parallel in both the East and Etruria, a hooked hunting tool like the Greek *lagobolon*, served as a status symbol for aristocrats or officials.⁷

Giovannangelo Camporeale, “Il teatro etrusco secondo le fonti scritte: spettacolo, ritualità, religione” (155-164), noting that theatrical performance played as important a part in Etruscan religion as in Greek or Roman cults, indicates its development from earliest times, and provides a set of classical *fontes* for Etruscan performance arts. A rare document (*ET Cl* 1.2552) is a funerary inscription for Arnth Trepu, who was a *thanasa* in the Latin bilingual, “*Histro*,” so an actor. From the 6th c. on, painted vases, bronzes, terracotta masks and Hellenistic urns depict theatrical scenes or characters.

A wealth of material evidence, to equal the better known data for Greek and Roman cults, has been [re-]discovered and finely analyzed by every author; they predict that much more information simply awaits the diligence of artifact-literate scholars.

Notes:

^{1.} For background, see N.T. de Grummond and E. Simon, eds., *The Religion of the Etruscans*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006; de Grummond, *Etruscan Myth, Sacred*

History and Legend, Philadelphia: University Museum Press, 2006; van der Meer *The Bronze Liver of Piacenza. Analysis of a Polytheistic Structure*, Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1987; and *Liber Linteus Zagrabensis. The Linen Book of Zagreb. A Comment on the Longest Etruscan Text*, Leuven: Peeters, 2007.

[2.](#) We can now identify the *fanum Voltumnae* thanks to the excavations of Simonetta Stopponi et al. in the Campo della Fiera of Orvieto: S. Stopponi, “Notizie preliminari dello scavo di Campo della Fiera,” *Annali Faina* 14 (2007) 493-530.

[3.](#) See D. Ciafaloni, “Nota sulle tipologie architettoniche e murarie tarquiniesi. Ulteriori corrispondenze con il Vicino Oriente antico,” in M. Bonghi Jovino, ed., *Tarquinia e le civiltà del Mediterraneo* (Milan 2006) 145-161.

[4.](#) Women’s anatomical votives were, however, placed in the ruined cultrooms of the goddesses Turan, Uni and Vei: A. Comella, *Il materiale votive tardo di Gravisca* (Rome 1978) 9-10.

[5.](#) For additional evidence such as moveable altars, inscriptions, and evidence of cult activity, species sacrificed, etc., see L. Donati and S. Rafanelli, “Il sacrificio nel mondo etrusco,” in *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum (ThesCRA)* vol. I, LIMC (Los Angeles 2004) 135-182 (altars 175-177).

[6.](#) Published after the colloquium and dealing with Etruscan Apollo and the Mt. Soracte cult: G. Colonna, “L’Apollo di Pyrgi, Šur/Šuri (il ‘Nero’) e l’Apollo *Sourios*,” *Studi Etruschi* 73 (2007 [2009]) 101-134.

[7.](#) I would suggest a parallel descent of Near Eastern cult insignia in the trident symbol, which represented a thunderbolt in Hittite iconography: see F. Sciacca, “Per una nuova interpretazione del tridente in bronzo dal Circolo del Tridente di Vetulonia,” *ArchClass* 55 (2004) 269-282. For compelling examples of princely Etruria embracing the regal and priestly trappings of Near Eastern cultures, see M. Sannibale, “Iconografie e simboli orientali nelle corti dei principi etruschi,” *Byrsa* 7.1/2 (2008) 85-123.