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Review of P. Gregory Warden, From the Temple and the Tomb

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From the Temple and the Tomb: Etruscan Treasures from Tuscany. P. Gregory Warden, (ed.). Dallas: Meadows Museum, SMU, 2009. Pp. 359. ISBN 978-1-60702-755-3. \$45.00.

Reviewed by Peter Nulton, *Rhode Island School of Design*

Exhibition catalogues have traditionally contained a number of related essays, but this volume is exceptional in the depth and breadth of the articles included. With topics ranging from urban landscape, to language, to gender studies, *From the Temple and the Tomb* can serve as a primer for the study of Etruscan culture. It is detailed enough to bring scholars working in tangentially-related specialties up to date on the rapid changes taking place in Etruscology. Importantly, for such a work, high-quality images abound. If one could have wished for the color photos that lavishly illustrate the articles in the first half to continue into the catalogue, the reasonable price of the volume more than compensates.

The exhibit in question took place at Southern Methodist University's Meadows Museum from January 4th through May 27th, 2009, and brought to Dallas over 300 objects from museums in Tuscany and private collections. Some of the material had recently been displayed in Madrid for *Los Etruscos*, but much was exclusive to the Dallas exhibit, organized by Giuseppina Carlotta Cianferoni of the Florence Archaeological Museum and P. Gregory Warden of SMU.

The title of both the volume and the exhibit reflects the importance of context in the state of knowledge of the Etruscans, as a vast majority of noteworthy artifacts come from ritual or funerary contexts. This is a result of centuries of selective excavation, which modern archaeologists are attempting to remedy, but also a matter of site preservation, and lastly, the lavishness with which the Etruscan elite supplied material goods for these contexts.

After a foreword by Fulvia Lo Schiavo, archaeological superintendent of Tuscany, and a preface by Mark A. Roglán, director of the Meadows Museum, P. Gregory Warden offers the acknowledgements. This is followed by a map of Etruria and a concise chronology page covering the major periods between the Villanovan and Roman. Warden's chapter, "The Etruscan Social and Urban Landscape," is the first of the long articles. After briefly addressing the history of the use of Etruscan culture as a lynchpin for Tuscan identity, the author reminds us of the reputation of the Etruscans as an unusually religious culture, and introduces a recurring theme in the articles, the lack of dichotomy between sacred and secular space. What the artifacts in the exhibit were unable to demonstrate, he offers, was Etruscan sophistication and the urban context. Warden points to the foundation of Rome through Etruscan ritual (the *pomerium*) and Etruscan engineering knowledge (the *cloaca maxima*). He is right to recognize that

Vitruvius' description of Etruscan temples is biased, though it seems to apply to some (the Portonaccio temple, at Veii, for example), and may over-generalize based on such structures as the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus in Rome, but also points out that Vitruvius' terminology refers to "Tuscan-style" temples, which mitigates the issue. For the Etruscans, a city is defined less by its population density than by its ritual structure. A brief overview of urbanization offers insights into development of Etruscan culture. As the Villanovan geometric culture becomes increasingly stratified, and population centers develop during the Orientalizing period, what we recognize as truly Etruscan comes to take shape, especially in the sphere of the elites. Stratification itself becomes a defining characteristic of the Etruscan city. Descriptions of Tarquinia and Marzabotto fill out the discussion, and the existence of Gonfienti, similarly aligned, but on the other side of the Apennines, spurs the suggestion that a "proper" city alignment might have existed. This essay is correctly placed first in the volume as it sets a spatial and chronological framework for the reader, and introduces important concepts that will be used in the subsequent chapters.

"Looking at Etruscan Art in the Meadows Museum," by Jocelyn Penny Small, offers much more than a tour through the exhibit. A caveat against interpreting Etruscan art in terms of Greek art begins the chapter. Throughout the centuries, many art historians have seen Etruscans as pale reflections, or barbaric imitators, of the "greater" art of Greece. If one is to appreciate the achievements of Etruscan art, it must be engaged on its own terms. Rather than the imitation of nature that was a guiding principle in Greek art, Etruscan art concerns itself with combining abstraction and design with naturalism, to arrive at its characteristic stylization. Although Etruscans borrowed motifs and forms from Greek art, they did so only if they found in them a purely local significance. Small argues that Etruscans did not imitate the Greek lekythos because it had no place in their culture, and some of the less appealing Etruscan art derives from attempts to imitate Greek art. Etruscans surpassed the achievements of Greek art in numerous areas: portraiture, jewelry and metalwork, and a sense of motion in painting.

Highlights of the exhibit included the large terracotta mother-and-child group known as "Mater Matuta," the Hellenistic terracotta pediment from Talamone, with the subject of Seven Against Thebes, and many funerary urns, several of which must have used the Talamone pediment as a source. Included are urns with sculptures of the deceased reclining on the lid, often described by Livy's phrase, *obesus Etruscus*. Small points out that the lids of these urns might have come blank, or with stock faces that could be modified into a likeness. One should be cautious, though, lest features that appear "imperfect" through modern eyes or through the window of Greek art, be taken as "likeness," when, in fact, it might also be read as an idealization of the values of *gravitas* (as in the many portraits of aristocrats from the Roman republic), and perhaps, prosperity.

Small makes an interesting point in regard to the bias so many authors have shown when dealing with Etruscan art: that when foreign artists move to Athens, art historians see their work as Attic, however Greek artists moving to Etruria are generally considered Greek, even if they are producing Etruscan art.

Although the subsequent chapter, Ingrid Edlund-Berry's "Temples and the Etruscan Way of Religion," begins by reminding the reader that one should not imagine a separation between sacred and secular spaces in Etruscan thought, a discussion follows of the natural and man-made boundaries by which sanctuaries and sacred precincts were marked out, as any property given over to a specific purpose might need be. Much of the chapter is organized as a point-by-point survey and comparison of the layout of known Etruscan sanctuaries, which present a great deal of diversity, from large precincts with grand temples, to clusters of votive offerings at makeshift shrines. The locality of these sanctuaries in relationship to nearby or related settlements is of great interest. While the Portonaccio temple at Veii is extra-mural, there is plenty of evidence for urban sanctuaries in Caere, although the only preserved temples are not in the city, but at its harbor at Pyrgi. Marzabotto has temples on a separate hill, next to the city hill. "City hill" is a term used extensively here, but rarely in the other articles in this volume. Poggio Colla, where both Edlund-Berry and Warden have excavated, is an example of a sanctuary in the countryside. Also worthy of note are the large courtyard-plan buildings at Murlo, Acquarossa, Satricum, and Montetosto, only the last to which Edlund-Berry assigns a primarily cultic function. Although the plans and small finds from the other buildings generally suggest a residential use, the lavish terracottas on the roof caused some scholars to associate them with temple architecture soon after their discovery, because Etruscologists at the time believed that such decoration was exclusive to temples.

The condition of our sources makes it difficult to associate names with temples, both those of architects or patrons, and those of the individual deities worshipped at a particular site. Sculptural programs are often of little use in determining the deity to whom the temple is dedicated. Several pages later, architectural terracottas from Bolsena are tentatively attributed to a sanctuary of the god Nortia because they are decorated with a youth.

Although seen in the context of a museum, a work of architectural sculpture like the Talamone pediment might display primarily Hellenistic influence and associations, Small argues, in its proper architectural contexts, it would speak of local traditions.

After a discussion of Etruscan altars, Small treats the difficult topic of cult statues. Although written tradition confirms their existence, and a few examples survive, the tendency for Etruscans to decorate the roofs of temples and other buildings with large-scale terracottas puts the placement and function of many surviving large statues into

question. Evidence for votives, sacrifices, and priests are also treated in this extensive chapter.

P. Gregory Warden's next contribution, "The Etruscan Way of Death," begins on a note of caution. Modern understanding of Etruscan funerary ritual is still rather cursory in spite of the fact that much of our knowledge of the Etruscans comes from material in a funerary context. The rich burials of the Etruscan elite from the Orientalizing and Archaic periods have been interpreted in terms of being outfitted for the afterlife with an assemblage similar to that used in life, but Warden suggests a more ritualized and nuanced version. Objects for funerary contexts could be decorative or miniature versions of everyday objects, broken or otherwise defaced, or even carved into the wall in relief, rendering them unusable by the living for purposes akin to those of their quotidian version. I wonder if the Etruscans shared with pharaonic Egyptians the belief that, for the dead, at least, a symbol is as real as that which it signifies. The author explores whether the meaning of an everyday object changes when put in mortuary context, then offers a chronological view of Etruscan burial practices. Recurring tendencies in the art and artifacts associated with Etruscan burial over time include reconstructing the body, reconstructing the home, and banqueting. The evidence for the archaic funeral rite is explored, including the anointing of the body, and the recent interpretation of the Sarcophagus of the Spouses from Cerveteri as an anointing scene rather than as a banquet is offered.

Perhaps most interesting is the discussion of the "land of the dead" as a physical location in Etruscan thought and its implications for interpretation. Warden asserts that the journey of the dead is overland, often taken in a chariot, and either alone or led by demons such as Vanth. The tomb, then, becomes a literal entrance to this region, sometimes with a painted door, as if to emphasize the point, as in the Tomb of the Augurs.

The iconographical and stylistic shift in the tomb paintings of the classical period at Tarquinia has often been interpreted in terms of the declining fortunes of the Etruscans paralleling the ascent of Roman power. Warden suggests that we see such scenes as demons and banquets of spirits of dead heroes, and the recently dead, also perhaps shown in the underworld, as demonstrating that the dead have arrived successfully at their destination.

Although Nancy de Grummond's chapter is entitled "Etruscan Women," she follows the practice in modern gender studies of discussing the cultural and material circumstances surrounding both males and females. The evidence available varies from period to period, and, more often than not, is scant. From the early Iron Age, the burial sub-assemblage of elite males marked them as warriors, while the female sub-assemblage was made up mainly of objects of personal adornment, and tools associated with textile production, denoting the value placed on the contribution of women to the

economy. Elite women likely managed, oversaw, and took part in this activity. Of great interest is that some of the earliest inscribed objects in Etruria are associated with textile production, suggesting that Etruscan women might have been integral to the spread of literacy. For the early periods, de Grummond discusses isolated pieces of artistic evidence that suggest ritualization of the process of weaving, and perhaps women taking a central role in sacrifice or the carving and distribution of meat. A discussion of marriage and family follows, with the suggestion that exogamous practices can be inferred from women's tombs with mainly imported grave goods. Although female burials containing chariots are rare, there is a great deal of evidence for other horse trappings. Warden's assertion in the previous chapter that the afterlife journey is overland comes to mind when reading this discussion.

De Grummond sees Etruscan elite society as part of a broad, international trend, in relation to increased trade, literacy, and urbanization, but demonstrates that there is a need for caution in terms of overgeneralization about the individual societies that are part of this trend. Evidence for the differing status of women in Greece and Etruria illustrates this point clearly. For the archaic and classical periods, artistic evidence is more helpful. Frieze plaques from Murlo show women with flowers or branches in the presence of men who carry symbols of office, and perhaps a bride traveling in a wagon with her dowry.¹

Dining practices offer an interesting insight into the roles of men and women. Etruscans originally practiced seated dining, which seems to remain an option (perhaps dictated by context) when Greek-style dining (on couches) is later adopted for banquets. While Greek women of rank are never shown dining with men (as it was against custom), Etruscan women are depicted at banquets, and did dine on couches with men, to the chagrin of the scandalized Greeks.² De Grummond notes that women are shown both reclining on the couches with men, and, occasionally, sitting upright at the end of a couch, but it is difficult to determine what, if anything, dictates the choice of position.

Etruscan fashion in different periods is explored, followed by an attempt to interpret objects used in daily life from the models that appear in tombs. An interesting tomb of a woman in Populonia contained a wealth of jewelry, a *patera* with an inscribed face, and many objects related to fire. The author focuses on the *patera* as suggesting the activity of lecanomancy, a form of divination, an important Etruscan activity that could be practiced by women as well as men. This is amply demonstrated by de

¹ On page 126, figure 2, a frieze plaque from Poggio Civitate illustrates a banqueting scene. The text refers to the seated figures scene, illustrated in Gantz 1971: 5 and Sinos 1994: 102. The former article makes a case for the seated figures as deities; the latter interprets the procession frieze as illustrating nobles assimilated to divinities through shared honors and trappings.

² Theopomp. Hist. 43.

Grummond in a later discussion of a mirror and of the spirit Vegoia/Vecuria, the Etruscan prophetess revered by the Romans.

The literally reflective nature of this activity is followed by a discussion of mirrors, which often seem to be designed with female consumers in mind, although they may have been purchased by men, perhaps as an important wedding gift to a bride. Mirror offerings are specific to tombs and are not seen as votives. Poignantly, de Grummond offers that mirrors might have been included in tombs for a number of reasons, chiefly, the need for it in the afterlife, or because it contained an image of the dead, and must be buried with them. Many mirrors seem to have themes related to love, marriage, and family. Divination is also a popular theme, suggesting that mirrors might have been used as a scrying tool.

Funerary evidence for priestesses is discussed in terms of a tomb occupied by unrelated women, where the title *hatrencu* seems to be employed in the epitaphs. A number of sarcophagi in the Tomba Bruschi at Tarquinia show women in special attire, with vessels and animals that may indicate sacrifice. Evidence from the average size and capacity of other tombs suggests the growing importance of extended family in the fourth century, as elite tomb chambers become larger and have greater capacity.

The Hellenistic period in Etruria is characterized by the encroachment of Roman power, and by a greater percentage of male burials than of female. Since the percentage change is often too great to be explained in terms of select female infanticide, de Grummond suggests that upper-class women were more likely to be buried in anonymous graves than in the earlier periods. The author questions the identification of a figure appearing on an urn chest as Scylla because the canine heads described in literary sources are lacking. It is worth noting, however, that Scylla figures in Hellenistic Greek and Macedonian contexts (e.g., the palace mosaics at Vergina) often lack the dog heads, similar to the way Hellenistic gorgons often lose their snakes, beard, and fangs.

“The Etruscans and the Greeks,” Ann Steiner’s contribution, begins by comparing an Etruscan life-sized votive head to a head from the Athenian Agora. After a brief point-by-point discussion, the most relevant differences are revealed: the Etruscan art shows an interest in pattern, demonstrates a form of hieratic scale, and displays a comfort with partial human forms (i.e. just a head), not seen in Greek art, which generally emphasized harmonious proportion between various body parts. Steiner intends to illustrate that the negotiation between Greek and Etruscan culture is more complex and more bilateral than once recognized, using examples from the exhibit.

Greek influence on the Etruscans is unquestionable; in addition to the Greek colonies in Italy, often in places that, like Campania, also contained Etruscan colonies, there is evidence for Greeks living at Cerveteri, Tarquinia, and Vulci. In the Archaic period, the Etruscans dedicated a building at Delphi, where they must have examined

and taken into account the smorgasbord of Greek architecture on display. Etruscans appropriate the Euboean alphabet, and even various Greek gods. What is important is that the Etruscans, rather than adopting Greek culture whole, adapt those aspects of it that they find relevant to their own cultural needs.

In regard to pottery, Etruscan bucchero compares favorably with other fine wares of the Mediterranean. While bucchero includes shapes that are very different from Greek shapes, the logic behind the decoration that accentuates the individual parts of a vessel while not detracting from the unity of the whole is shown to be similar. Even imported pottery does not show a simple relationship between Greek and Etruscan. An Attic cup signed by Euphronios as potter in the Villa Giulia also bears an Etruscan graffito, in which the owner dedicates it to Heracle, who he likely saw as an Etruscan hero. Steiner points out that, while Etruscans imitate Greek work fairly closely in the “Italo-Corinthian” style, the later Etruscan version of Attic work shows more creativity and variation. An Etruscan Black-Figure stamnos, in the catalogue, shows a Pyrrhic dance with Etruscan weapons, and a livelier sense of motion than was achieved in the Greek scenes which must have served as its model.

As Steiner points out, the influence between Etruscan and Greek, not unlike the trade, was definitely two-way. Etruscan shapes like the Nikosthenic *amphora* and the *kyathos* were adopted by Greek artists. “Arafat and Morgan note that there is no evidence that the Athenians themselves were involved in trade with Etruria, so they were unlikely, in general, to know the nuances of this market” (153). Steiner notes that Etruscans and Greeks used pottery for different purposes. Various shapes and styles of Greek pottery were received or rejected differently by different Etruscan cities. “Pottery could not have played an essential role in any core cultural activities crucial to Etruscan identity” (154).

The social institutions of which the pottery is part and parcel were also not adopted wholesale by the Etruscans. Unlike the Greek *symposion*, Etruscan banquets held a greater emphasis on food and apparently involved the family women. Votive dedications, although there is some commonality between Etruscan and Greek practices, show important differences. The likes of the anatomical votives found at Etruscan sanctuaries seem to be restricted to healing divinities like Asklepios in Greece, and there is no Greek equivalent of the popular Etruscan votive head.

Temple decorations also show important differences. While Greek temples generally share similar basic construction to Etruscan temples (post-and-lintel, columns as a visual focus), plan, elevation, and building materials show important differences. Not least, the sculptural decoration is focused on different parts of the building. Steiner discusses the Talamone pediment. The triangular shape of the pediment is familiar from Greek art, and the subject matter of Seven Against Thebes from Greek myth. But, in spite of this, the composition is purely Etruscan, utilizing a

foreground, a middle ground, and a background, with smaller scenes and figures stacked upon one another to show depth in contour to the shape of the pediment. With regard to sculpture in the round, Steiner identifies the hallmarks of classicism: idealized realism, symmetria, and the contrapposto stance. Etruscan works that are often perceived as “classical-looking” generally lack one or more of these traits, in favor of abstraction and hieratic proportion.

Without Greek influence, Steiner concludes, Etruscan culture would still have been able to express any noteworthy idea or sentiment, but Greek influence offered a wider vocabulary. “The material culture and aesthetic package the Greeks brought to the Etruscans is not superficial, nor is it a driving force, but it is at times right at the center of how Etruscans act Etruscan” (161).

The final article, “The Etruscan Language,” belongs to Rex Wallace, and offers a thorough analysis of the current state of knowledge on the subject. To this day, much of the general public still believes Etruscan to be indecipherable; hopefully, this exhibit and article can serve to disabuse those who encounter it. Wallace opens by discussing the problem of the evidence. With no known related languages (two likely possibilities are poorly attested: the language of the well-known grave stele from Lemnos and Raetian) Etruscan is truly a dead language. Around 10,000 texts are known, only a handful contain more than 30 lines, and most texts are short epitaphs. The chronological and dialectical differences are discussed, as well as the main means for understanding grammar: short, formulaic inscriptions that tend to take the same form in many languages. The introduction and various forms taken by the Etruscan alphabet are then discussed. Writing tends to be sinistroverse (right to left), and, in early periods, *scriptio continua* (no spaces between the words).

A large number of vocabulary words are included in the article. The securest are those that can be read on epitaphs: family relations, tombs and burial equipment, and offices held by the deceased. Also included are time words, names of gods and heroes, and words borrowed from Greek. Nouns have a complex case system, but no gender system, instead being divided into “animate” and “inanimate” forms. Virtually all verbal inflexion is handled with suffixes.

Etruscan employs a relatively limited phonemic inventory of 4 vowels and 17 consonants, and sentence order is subject-object-verb. In contexts in which the referent is known, the identifying noun could be omitted, such as in the case of “(son) of.” Substantial obstacles still exist to understanding the rules for subordinating clauses.

A discussion of Etruscan proper names and of the interpretation of inscriptions is followed by a discussion of the linguistic affiliation of Etruscan. The in-depth analysis of the language offered in this article would serve as an excellent introduction to Etruscan for those interested in learning, and an important update for those whose education in

the language began with older sources, and may wish to look into newer texts on the subject.

A catalogue of inscriptions in the exhibit forms a bookend to the article section of the volume in preparation for the catalogue. Although, as one might expect, most of these inscriptions are short epitaphs, a few are worthy of special note. Number 242 shows the spread of Roman power and influence. It uses the Latin alphabet, as well as the Roman formula to denote a freedman. Number 289, the Magliano disk, is still somewhat enigmatic. The text forms a spiral. Some of the vocabulary is obscure, but *aiseras*, “for the gods,” can be read clearly within part of it. This has caused some to see it as a text with ritual instructions, but imperatives are rare, and necessitative verbs are lacking.

After a general introduction, each section in the Catalogue of Works is opened by a discussion by Giuseppina Carlotta Cianferoni. Introductory essays to the chronological sections such as “The Origins of Etruscan Civilization (Ninth-Late Eighth Century B.C.E.)” not only introduce the question in the title, but also treat the main archaeological topics of the period. The other sections of the catalogue include: “Princely Culture (Late Eight–First Quarter of the Sixth Century B.C.E.),” “Urban Society (End of the Seventh-Fourth Century B.C.E.),” and “Hellenism and Romanticism.” The entry for each object includes: descriptive title, museum or collection and inventory number, find spot, dimensions, medium, and date, followed by a short description. Photographs in the catalogue are, as a rule, monochrome, but, as stated before, high-quality color images elsewhere in the text and the affordability of the volume ameliorate this deficiency.

The back matter of the volume consists of a Glossary of Archaeological Terms, an extensive bibliography, and a helpful index. The Glossary serves to make the text friendlier to the general museum-going public.

The comprehensive nature of this work makes it a necessity for Etruscologists, a refresher course for those studying related cultures, and a stand-alone primer for curious armchair scholars. It speaks to the nature of Etruscan studies that an exhibition catalogue like *From the Temple and the Tomb* should treat so many cultural aspects in such depth.

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