Among the Phantoms of Men Outworn:

In the Tomb of Orcus, Greek Myth Illustrates Etruscan Beliefs and Political Reality

Master’s Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Graduate Program in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies
Ann Koloski-Ostrow, Advisor

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts
in
Ancient Greek and Roman Studies

by
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August 2015
Acknowledgements

I have to express my deepest and most sincere thanks to Professor Ann Koloski-Ostrow. Since I first started at Brandeis, you have been a friend, mentor, and teacher in so many ways. Your patience, understanding, and commitment to me have always been palpable and I cannot express just how thankful I truly am. As I have told you before, you changed my life.

I would also like to thank Professor Lenny Muellner for taking time to read this thesis and provide insight even at a time when you are beginning a very active retirement. Also, thanks to Professor Andrew Koh whose classes I enjoyed immensely, and whose commitment to fieldwork helped me fulfill a lifelong dream of digging in Greece. I have met several good friends and many great people in the Brandeis Graduate Program for Ancient Greek and Roman Studies, and I will continue to be one of its most ardent cheerleaders.

And finally, to my husband Angel, thank you so much for putting up with my many hours and days glued to my laptop, surrounded by books, and talking incessantly about fourth century Etruscan burial practices. Now we can go to the beach.
ABSTRACT

Among the Phantoms of Men Outworn:

In the Tomb of Orcus II, Greek Myth Illustrates Etruscan Beliefs and Political Reality

A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies

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This thesis examines the choices the artists and owners of the Tomb of Orcus II made in depicting specific characters, images, and visual narratives within an Etruscan funerary context of the fourth century BCE. The tomb represents centuries of cultural diffusion from Greek traders and the settlers of Magna Graecia repeatedly sharing their stories, beliefs, and material goods with the powerful Etruscan settlements of central Italy. Taken in its entirety, the Tomb of Orcus transported its occupants directly into the underworld of Homer’s epics and placed the deceased among the great Greek heroes of art and song. The narrative cycle of Orcus II reveals a discernable interest in rebirth, resurgence, and an anticipation of a personal spiritual renewal mirrored by a cultural and political renewal of the Etruscan power base at Tarquinia.

Built in phases, the tomb reflected a Mediterranean world in transition, and an ideology about the afterlife equally in flux. An important aspect of my research is an accounting of the historical context of the tomb’s construction and how political and military events translated into specific imagery within the tomb. The two main periods of construction and decoration happened during the gradual decline and incorporation of Etruria into the Romans’ rapidly expanding
civilization. Despite challenges presented by a generally poor state of preservation, the site offers an intriguing glimpse into Etruscan funerary practices, and by extension, the fusion of Etruscan and Greek mythology concerning death and the afterlife.

The architecture of the tomb includes two areas of physical burial space adjoined by a narrow passageway. Scholars refer to the older portion of the tomb as Orcus I, and the later construction as Orcus II. While Orcus I presents a more traditional view of the Etruscan afterlife and shares much of its visual language with contemporary tombs, Orcus II suggests a new, changing perspective that is discernable both by its own imagery and by its juxtaposition with Orcus I. The entire space offers an illuminating narrative about a critical period of central Italian history.
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Introduction

In 1868, an enterprising French army officer discovered a large subterranean tomb in the area of the Monterozzi necropolis, just outside of the ancient city of Tarquinia.¹ The multi-room space lay just under an existing modern cemetery and was immediately noted for its Hellenistic frescoes, even in their poor state of preservation. At that time, Tarquinia was already well known for its nearly 200 Etruscan tombs dating from the late seventh to the fourth centuries BCE.² According to Dennis, the French soldier who discovered the tomb was rumored to have wanted to remove various portions of the wall paintings for the purpose of delivering them to the Louvre, though this is difficult to confirm.³ More certain is that the frescoes existed in fragments, and that a portion of the ceiling in between the two main spaces had collapsed, perhaps in antiquity.⁴ That, coupled with a lack of mention of any grave goods in the scholarly literature, makes an examination and interpretation of the Tomb of Orcus an exercise in extrapolation based upon the existing evidence.

The Tomb of Orcus lies between two larger burial grounds on rugged terrain just outside of the city of Tarquinia. Access to the tomb originally came by way of a dromos that led down into the tomb in a southwesterly direction, opening into the older portion of the burial chamber.

³ Dennis, 345. The discovery story appears first in Dennis (1883), but without corroborating evidence. At the time French troops were quartered nearby as part of the protective force Napoleon III sent to preserve the rule of Pope Pius IX against the forces of Garibaldi; this fact makes Dennis’s account at least plausible.
⁴ Helbig, 257-258. Writing in Italian, Helbig announces the discovery of the Tomb of Orcus while qualifying his descriptions with the detail that several of the wall paintings are “disgracefully” only conserved in fragments.
A second, unexcavated dromos is known to have existed as the entrance into the newer portion of the tomb, Orcus II. The oldest portion of the tomb, Orcus I, dates from the late fifth to early fourth centuries BCE. Most scholars arrive at this estimate by comparing the artistic styles of the architecture, wall paintings, and chemical analysis of the pigments to other known tombs of the Monterozzi necropolis as well as other sites in Caere and Orvieto. The wall paintings in this area of the tomb are severely damaged and only exist in fragments. From these, a traditional banqueting scene emerges with the likely owners of the tomb, a noble Etruscan family of Tarquinia, feasting in the underworld. Here the main portions of the artwork consist of vines and phalluses, likely referencing a Dionysiac context of the banquet, vegetation representing trees or reed plants associated with the rivers of the underworld, and one of the most famous images in Etruscan funerary art—the profile portrait of Velia Velcha. From the epithets on the walls and comparative inscriptions referring to the Velcha and Spurinna families elsewhere, the identity of this noblewoman as the wife of a local magistrate and the cohabitant of the tomb makes sense. That she would be present at such a feast in a place commensurate with that of her husband and in spite of her sex speaks to traditional Etruscan allowances for the presence of women at social events and in funerary contexts. The Etruscan elites diverted from the strict prohibition of women other than entertainers and prostitutes at symposia that had been imposed by their Greek

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6 Haynes, 312-313.
counterparts. The Etruscan practice evoked abject disgust expressed by some Roman commentators.7

Indications that Orcus I’s underworld setting include its background gloom and the presence of Charun, the Etruscan death demon who wields his mallet and includes in himself elements of Hermes *psychopompus*, Charon the ferryman, and Thanatos along with indigenous Etruscan features within his identity are the clearest indication that the viewer is meant to be in the underworld. Charun appears frequently in Etruscan myth and funerary imagery and while his role and function is not completely understood, clearly he has implications surrounding the transportation of individuals to the underworld.8 In the space of Orcus I, Charun stands in the posture of either guard or attendant, watchfully apart from the participants of the feast, though placed directly between the two perpendicular walls representing it. Both the attendance of Charun and the representations of cloudy gloom within the space carry through from the Tomb of Orcus I to that of Orcus II, where more clouds appear around the figures of Etruscan Hades and Persephone, and the number of demons, creatures, and underworld characters are substantially increased. In Orcus I and II, the architecture of the tombs allows for niches where cinerary urns, offerings, or sarcophagi may have been placed at the time of the deceased owners’ burials.9 Despite the absence of a large trove of artifacts recorded as having been found within

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9 Jannot, 55-59 for descriptions of funerary receptacles and depictions of the dead. Haynes, 287-299 offers a comprehensive look at funerary sculpture, especially sarcophagi and cinerary urns.
either portion of the tomb, the placement of items of value would be consistent with all other Etruscan tombs of the elites of this time period.\textsuperscript{10}

The Tomb of Orcus I is a single internal space approximately five meters by five meters, and about two meters high.\textsuperscript{11} Orcus II is a second large burial space, also generally square although a bit larger than Orcus I, with an entirely novel series of wall paintings representing Greek mythological heroes and gods generally surrounding the theme of the \textit{nekyia} of Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} along with other related myths.\textsuperscript{12} While Orcus II is also heavily damaged and in a poor state of preservation, the imagery that remains represents a complex and vivid attempt by the artists to place the deceased among the heroic dead. The two rooms, Orcus I and Orcus II, communicate with one another through a partially collapsed space in between them that scholars often designate as Orcus III despite a dearth of evidence that the space served as a separate and distinct burial chamber apart from Orcus I and Orcus II. Because the evidence is so scant, scholars disagree as to the purpose and meaning of Orcus III, with the most likely explanation pointing to a purposeful clearing of the space between two existing tombs to create a third, enlarged one.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Haynes, 287-299 for funerary sculpture, 308-314 for elite burials at Tarquinia, and 319-326 for Etruscan pottery contemporary with the Tomb of Orcus.

\textsuperscript{11} Salvatore D’Agostino, \textit{et al}, \textit{Structural engineering and geology applied to the static problems of the Etruscan “Tomba dell’Orco” (Tarquinia, Central Italy)}. (Journal of Cultural Heritage, Vol. 11 (1), 2010) provides an overview of the physical space of the Tomb of Orcus along with scientific analysis of the geology and stability of the tomb’s architecture.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Odyssey} XI

\textsuperscript{13} Haynes, 312. For an alternative perspective, see Maurizio Harari, “Orcus III,” in, Maria Bonghi Jovino \textit{et al}, \textit{Interpretando l’antico: Scritti di archeologia offerti a Maria Bonghi Jovino (Vol. 1)}. Milan: Cisalpina, 2012, 287-308. Harari argues that Orcus III does represent a distinct area of activity whereby Orcus I and II were joined to make one single space, a space devoted to the worship of, sacrifice for, and communication with the dead. He presents evidence of fragmentary images that include the leading of an animal to sacrifice. While there has not been other evidence of sacrifice or continual use of the space after the end of the fourth century BCE, he includes certain logical connections to the myths of Herakles and Cerberus.
Orcus II is generally accepted as a later addition to the necropolis by descendants of the family deposited in Orcus I, or by an offshoot of the family more distant than direct relatives.\textsuperscript{14} As Orcus II shows evidence of a separate entrance opening from a different, though parallel, dromos from that of Orcus I, the idea that the two tombs were once separate but in antiquity were joined by means of the destruction of the internal dividing wall fits with the existing archaeological evidence. This conclusion is bolstered by the partial coffering of the ceiling of Orcus III.\textsuperscript{15} The dating of Orcus II comes from the same kind of analysis that places Orcus I in the late fifth to early fourth century BCE also places Orcus II at the end of the fourth and even into the early third century BCE.\textsuperscript{16} That analysis includes examination of the style of art, subject matter, inscriptions, architecture, and chemical analysis of the paint to create a best guess, though as with Orcus I, no finite proof has been presented that either range of dates is correct. The most convincing evidence of the dating of Orcus II includes a comparison of the facial depictions of Agamemnon and the shade of Tiresias with similar images on vases from southern Italy, particularly Lucanian artifacts, and with bronze Etruscan mirrors. Etruscan mirrors commonly had mythological characters etched onto their obverse sides.\textsuperscript{17}

The combination of scenes within the burial space presents an intimate look into the beliefs, attitude, and aspirations of the owners of Orcus II and the artists they hired. While earlier Etruscan tombs of the previous two centuries favored myths from the Homeric \textit{Iliad}, apocryphal stories about Achilles, general scenes of war and sacrifice, and more gleeful scenes of afterlife

\textsuperscript{14} Haynes, 312-313.  
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 312.  
\textsuperscript{16} Steingräber, 245ff  
\textsuperscript{17} Grummond (2006) is especially well documented using Etruscan mirrors for the purposes of identifying mythological characters and drawing conclusions about societal and religious beliefs from them; Larissa Bonfante, \textquotedblleft Daily Life and Afterlife\textquotedblright{} in \textit{Etruscan Life and Afterlife: A Handbook of Etruscan Studies}. Edited by Larissa Bonfante. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 232-273 also makes good use of Etruscan mirrors to glean information about Etruscan myth and funerary beliefs, including the imagery and roles of Vanths and other characters of the afterlife.
banqueting, the walls of Orcus II are much more ambiguous.\textsuperscript{18} The scenes of Odysseus blinding the Cyclops and the presence of Agamemnon and Tiresias together in an underworld setting suggest the Homeric \textit{Odyssey} and the hero’s journey. On adjoining walls there are other scenes taken primarily from Greek myth. One scene is of the three-headed giant Geryon standing before the royal couple, Hades and Persephone. On another wall, a melancholy Theseus and Pirithous sit over a board game. Elsewhere, there are tantalizing fragments of images, including the eternal punishment of Sisyphus and the attendance of Ajax, along with other references to \textit{Odyssey} Book XI.

Interspersed among these more traditional Greek scenes are distinctly Etruscan elements. Guarding Theseus and Pirithous, a menacing demon labeled ‘Tuchulcha’ stands with outspread wings and clutching dangerous snakes in each hand. Otherworldly creatures akin to winged Hypnos and Thanatos known as Vanths, along with Charun, haunt the burial space.\textsuperscript{19} On the wall directly opposite the scene of Odysseus and his men blinding the Cyclops is a quiet scene of a large shelf laden with golden vessels of different shapes and sizes and a naked young man standing next to it. The scene may reference a coming feast that has not yet begun. Taken as a single space, Orcus II may puzzle the observer with disparate myths that seem unrelated, or from unrelated groupings, but are instead distinct episodes woven together along a common theme—that heroes are able to escape death, that true heroes make it to the hopeless depth of despair and are able to come back, whether by rescue, by cunning, by brute force, or by the rising of a new generation. This thesis examines that theme, brings it into clear focus, and places it within the wider context of the tomb’s construction. The ideology of escape, of rebirth, and of anticipation

\textsuperscript{18} Steingräber (2006)
\textsuperscript{19} Jannot, 62-63, 174-181 for an explanation of Etruscan understanding of the characters of the afterlife, including demons, Charun, and Vanth(s).
would have been particularly attractive to an Etruscan elite, or more specifically to a Tarquinian elite, in the third and fourth centuries BCE.

**Tarquinia**

An ancient city, Tarquinia enjoyed years of prosperity during the Etruscan domination of central Italy and the Tyrrhenian Sea trade routes in the centuries before the ascendance of Rome. Etruscan contact with Greeks and Phoenicians dates back to the Bronze Age scramble for the natural resources of Sardinia, for luxury goods among the ruling classes of all Mediterranean civilizations, and later through the movement of populations from overcrowded or unsteady cities into new regions of colonial settlements (**Figure 1**). A tremendous amount of cultural mixing occurred in the course of the establishment and expansion of the central Mediterranean trade network. While Greeks fleeing Ionia founded colonies throughout southern Italy and Sicily beginning in the eighth century BCE, the Etruscans exponentially increased their interactions with that area. Trade helped to satisfy one of the most important material desires of the Etruscan ruling class, that for fine Attic pottery related to the culture of feasting and conversely, as important funerary status symbols.

While the flow of Greek pottery continued, the stories of the Greek heroes and deities accompanied it. Etruscans developed a parallel mythology to link their civilization with the heroic past so powerfully sung to the Greeks by the Homeric tradition. The Etruscans combined

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20 Haynes, 220-243 for an overview of Tarquinia’s prosperity during the Archaic Age.
21 Richard Miles, *Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Civilization*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 43, 62, and 95ff. Though Miles is concerned with the Phoenician and Carthaginian roles, his perspective of central Mediterranean power politics in the centuries before Roman dominance is illustrative of the environment in which the Etruscans of Tarquinia were operating.
their beliefs with those of the Greeks to develop a hybrid tradition, one that had the important function of giving them, or more accurately the ruling elite, a sense of legitimacy, of history, and a kind of cultural depth that allowed them to place their civilization above others, especially the upstart Romans, and among the likes of the mythical heroes of past ages. The city of Tarquinia, with its historical and mythical connection to the founding traditions of Rome through its kings of the sixth and seventh centuries BCE, experienced periods of ascendancy over its neighbors followed by a steady decline and submission to Roman domination, a decline sometimes punctuated by small periods of resurgence. As the fourth century BCE marked a pivotal time in Rome’s progression into an Italian power beyond the Tiber and was a time of an accelerating decline of the Etruscan civilization generally, and of Tarquinia specifically. The cities of Etruria used the complicated political and diplomatic power dynamics of the region to their advantage in trying to stand strong against Roman aggression. While Rome, Syracuse, Etruria, Carthage, and myriad Greek cities and their colonies of the Mediterranean all sought to become preeminent, the struggle involved much more than just force of arms. Cultural depth and legitimacy played meaningful roles in giving one civilization or another the advantage over its competitors. Mediterranean elites used mythology on religious, civic, political, and artistic fronts to promote their civilization’s connection to the heroic past and advertise divine favor. The same mythology would simultaneously bolster the civilization’s self-image.

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23 Miles, 96-101 for a cogent presentation of the Heraklean Way, a speculative route that Herakles took on his return voyage home from Erytheia, as a vehicle for cultural, and therefore political, legitimacy.


25 Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola, and Richard J. Talbert. *The Romans, From Village to Empire*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 58, 75-93 for an examination of Roman aggression in central Italy during the fourth century BCE.

The turbulent history of the fourth century in central Italy directly influenced the selection of images within the Tomb of Orcus II and understanding it gives the observer a unique perspective into the ethos of the Tarquinian ruling class. As the fourth century BCE began, the small but expanding city-state of Rome seemed to be in dire trouble. Its sacking by the Gauls in 387 BCE presented an existential crisis so grave that the political leadership considered transposing the government to the newly conquered city of Veii. Then, through a series of consequential wars both within Italy and in the greater Mediterranean, the Romans battled the Samnites, the Latins, the Macedonians under King Phillip, various Etruscan city-states, and witnessed the meteoric rise and early death of Alexander the Great. Tarquinia anxiously watched the Romans suffer both horrible defeats and unlikely victories, while at times it was making peace with the Romans and witnessing the rise of possible Greek-speaking rivals to Rome in the triumphs of Alexander the Great, the tyrants of Syracuse, and later, the advances of Pyrrhus of Epirus. The strong resistance, or possibility of resistance, of these Greek powers to the growing influence of Rome can be witnessed in the scenes of Orcus II. The deeds of the great heroes of Greek myth echoed in the contemporary world of Tarquinia in the fourth century BCE.

Beyond the most conspicuous elements of Greek mythology and the cultural influence of the Greeks on Etruscan civilization, cities like Tarquinia had a long tradition of indigenous beliefs and a trading past that began around the time of the Iron Age. Evidence shows that Phoenician traders, either from Phoenician outposts on Sardinia, its colony at Carthage, or directly from the Levant, were present in the region as early as the eighth century BCE. Inscriptions on golden tablets found at Pyrgi attest to a shared worship in the languages of the Greeks.

27 Boatwright, 58-59 for the sacking of Rome and the fall of Veii; Livy 55.5, 11-19 for the way, serious or not, that Roman leaders contemplated moving to Veii after the sacking of Rome.
28 Boatwright, 84-93; Miles, 157-159.
29 Haynes, 45-46, 79-81.
30 Miles, 93, 110.
Phoenicians and the Etruscans, demonstrating a close and lasting interaction between the two civilizations already in place by the end of the sixth century BCE.  

The fourth century BCE, while marked by shifting positions and fortunes within the power struggle of central Italian cultures, was also a time of ascendancy for Tarquinia, even when neighboring Etruscan cities were suffering decline and defeat. One physical monument to the prosperity enjoyed by Tarquinia in the middle of the fourth century BCE is the Ara della Regina, a massive stone temple constructed just outside of the city and dedicated most likely to the goddess Artemis, or her Etruscan incarnation. The temple stood at 77 by 34 meters on a raised platform, possibly over the site of an earlier temple, and would have represented a massive undertaking both in terms of effort and expenditure on the part of the citizenry of Tarquinia.

Tarquinia also had a history of tying its fortunes to those of Athens beyond its love for Attic pottery, and it often saw a common interest aligning the elites of the two powerful cities against the aggression of Syracuse in Sicily in the fifth century BCE, and the Romans in the fourth. This alliance includes mention of a certain Spurinna of Tarquinia, possibly a member of the family who owned the Tomb of Orcus I, and thereby a distant relative or ancestor of the owner of Orcus II, leading a contingent of Etruscans during the disastrous invasion of Syracuse undertaken by Athenian forces in the midst of the Peloponnesian War. An allusion to this alliance may exist in the depictions of Theseus and Pirithous in Orcus II, as well as in the blinding of the Cyclops. Theseus and Pirithous, two heroes bound together in a promise to undertake an impossible and daring task are thereby bound to suffer the consequences of their

31 Ibid; Haynes, 174-177 for a more nuanced approach to the Pyrgi tablets. Though the meanings of the tablets’ inscriptions are not certain, they regardless attest to a Phoenician presence in an Etruscan outpost.
32 Haynes, 220-221; Jannot, 76-77.
33 Haynes, 261-263; Miles, 121ff; Pomeroy, 229-230; Thucydides 6.88.6.
34 Haynes, 386; Steingräber, 22; Thucydides, 7.53.1
mutual fates, might represent the cities of Athens and Tarquinia.\textsuperscript{35} Theseus, as the mythological founder of Athens, makes reference to the city just by his presence, though the choice of the artist to depict Pirithous by his side reflects a theme of friendship and alliance that ultimately fails to accomplish an impossible deed—in this case the abduction of Persephone. Persephone herself also speaks to a Sicilian connection, as both she and her mother, Demeter, had long been associated with the island.\textsuperscript{36} Sicily had also been held as a possible home to the race of Cyclopes, so the scene of Odysseus blinding the grotesque and fearsome beast is another reference to the island, the site of the Sicilian Expedition.\textsuperscript{37}

The construction of Orcus II, if undertaken around the turn of the fourth and into the third centuries BCE, would necessarily reflect Tarquinia’s eye to a greater past and an uncertain future. Despite the autonomy that Tarquinia enjoyed for much of its history, the march of the Romans across the central Italian peninsula was eventually unstoppable. By the mid-third century BCE, Rome had subdued most rival tribes, including the Samnites and Latins, had made inroads into Magna Graecia, and had absorbed most of the Etruscans’ former territory into the Roman Republic. Even worse, Rome often resettled its former soldiers onto rich agricultural land once possessed by Etruscan elites.\textsuperscript{38} The ascendency of Rome became clear after the mid-third century BCE war with the powerful city-state of Carthage, the First Punic War, which confirmed Rome’s status as the preeminent power in the central Mediterranean, and confirmed the subservience of Etruria.\textsuperscript{39} Soon after, Tarquinia’s prominence faded, and it became a lackluster Roman possession with little mention in the historical record from the beginning of the second

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\textsuperscript{35} Apollodorus, Epit.1.11 20-24
\textsuperscript{37} For references to Sicily or Mt. Etna as the possible homes of the Cyclopes, see Apollodorus, Epit 7.7.1; Callimachus, Hymn 3.46-86; Strabo 8.6.11; Virgil, Aeneid VIII.474-513.
\textsuperscript{38} Boatwright, 75-96; Haynes, 383-389; Miles, 157-159.
\textsuperscript{39} Boatwright, 97-152; Miles, 177ff.
century BCE, aside from its role as a supplier of raw materials or trade goods. Though the artists and occupants of Orcus II could not have anticipated the exact arc of their town’s history, the general decline of its fortunes was well underway, though the artists and owners of Orcus II held to the remote possibility that past eras of prosperity could somehow be repeated.

Inscriptions

Etruscan inscriptions exist in both sections of the Tomb of Orcus, offering a tantalizingly incomplete description of the tomb’s occupants and of the characters depicted on the walls. While the Etruscan written language has been partially deciphered, it is still not completely understood.40 This incomplete knowledge of the Etruscan language combined with the damaged state of the wall paintings means that the writing that does exist requires some creative interpretation to be read in a comprehensible way. In Orcus I most of the inscriptions include proper names, titles, genealogy, and honorifics that point to the Spurinna family of Tarquinia, or possibly the Murinna offshoot, who were local magistrates that also went by the title Velthur.41 Because the exact familial relationships are unclear, and due to the lack of corroborating written evidence, much of the scholarship surrounding the ownership and occupancy of both tombs relies on circumstantial evidence.

In Orcus II, the inscriptions are almost exclusively for the purpose of identifying characters within the visual representations of known mythology. The inscriptions name Greek heroes, or rather the Etruscan incarnations of Greek heroes, along with the Etruscan underworld

demon Tuchulcha.\textsuperscript{42} Just as a direct transliteration of Etruscan names with their like-sounding Greek counterparts risks an overly simplified interpretation, so there is danger in equating every character depicted with a known Greek myth, and in reading the tomb’s message in a contrary way that misses the Etruscan elements blended into the narrative. While many of the tomb’s depictions are clearly taken from the Homeric tradition, distinct characteristics of Etruscan beliefs are discernible, particularly in the imagery of underworld demons, creatures, and space.

The lack of Etruscan written documentation outside of monumental and funerary inscriptions, votive contexts, and familial appellations, means that large-scale comparisons between words and texts are impossible.\textsuperscript{43} Instead, the visual imagery of the tomb’s walls must be read as a type of text in its own right, and that comparisons with other visual representations of myth serve a useful purpose in interpreting them. The fragmentary conditions of many of the inscriptions of Orcus I, and of several of the names labeling characters in Orcus II underscore the importance of a visual reading of the tomb. The inscriptions represent a small, though important, part of the larger puzzle.

The work of this thesis is focused more on the interpretation of the visual imagery of the Tomb of Orcus and therefore does not involve the close interpretation and translation of the Etruscan inscriptions. In this work, translations and meanings of the various inscriptions come from secondary sources, particularly those of Giuliano Bonfante and Larissa Bonfante. As the bulk of this focuses on Orcus II, the names presented as labeled are fairly reliable, since they are based on visual corroboration for each of the characters. The difficult work of parsing out familial inscriptions and relationships is partially based on the work of Torelli and of Haynes. Writing in 1893, the scholar W. M. Lindsay began a book review of the then newly published

\textsuperscript{42} Steingräber, 245ff.
\textsuperscript{43} Bonfante and Bonfante (2002), 56-63.
Corpus Inscriptionum Etruscarum by saying, “The interpretation of Etruscan has come to be regarded as a hopeless problem, as hopeless as the attempt to square the circle or as the quest for the philosopher’s stone.” Luckily, enough of the Etruscan language has been deciphered in the past century of scholarship that most material has been reasonably interpreted and may be used with a degree of confidence not previously justified.

A Note about Terminology/Appellation

The tomb of Orcus represents a highly developed cultural amalgam of Etruscan, Greek, Latin, and Phoenician religious beliefs, mythology, and artistic imagery. In my work, mythological characters’ names and those of historical figures are inscribed in Etruscan, translated into English, and given the name of the equivalent Greek hero, god, or creature. For the sake of clarity, I will use English translations of Greek names when applicable, and English translations of Etruscan names when necessary. The goal is to keep all appellations consistent throughout this work and avoid confusion. Since most of the underlying mythology is of Greek origin, the Greek names of heroes and gods seem most appropriate. The only deviations from these labels will occur when directly quoting primary or secondary sources in reference to a specific point of discussion.

The tomb itself has been called by several monikers since its discovery. ‘Tomb of Orcus’ refers to the wall painting of Odysseus blinding the Cyclops in which the Cyclops is shown as a deformed, grotesque creature akin to an ogre, or orco in Italian. The term Orcus has also come to refer to the underworld, or the god representing death in the later Roman pantheon. The tomb has also been called the Tomb of Polyphemus, the Tomb of Velia Velcha, the Tomb of the Spurinna

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(family), and the Grotta dell’Orco meaning the grotto or cave of the ogre.\footnote{Dennis, 345-346.} As discussed earlier, the tomb consists of three parts: Tomb of Orcus I, the older part in which Velia Velcha’s portrait famously appears, Tomb of Orcus II where the Homeric scenes appear and is the focus of this thesis, and Tomb of Orcus III which represents the partially collapsed space which joins the two burial chambers of Orcus I and Orcus II (Figure 2).
Chapter 1: Traditionally Etruscan: The Tomb of Orcus I

Etruscan tombs of the seventh, sixth, and fifth centuries BCE reflected the prosperous and powerful elites of the cities of central Italy. Tombs were well appointed with luxury goods, high quality Attic pottery, weapons and tools of bronze and iron, and intricately designed sarcophagi. Tomb walls were often vividly painted with scenes pastoral and celebratory as well as violent and vengeful. Often certain elements of Greek myth, particularly the Homeric tradition of Achilles, connected the occupants of certain tombs with the ancient heroes of Greek myth. Dancers, musicians, banqueters, servants, lovers, and warriors all adorned the interiors of early Etruscan burial spaces (Figures 5-10). The quality of both tomb spaces and tomb goods are directly proportional to the prosperity of a particular Etruscan city at a specific point in its history. This is especially true with respect to the elites’ access to luxury goods from the wider Mediterranean, especially to raw materials like gold, ivory, and pigments, along with high-quality manufactured goods like furniture, pottery, jewelry, and etched mirrors. Much of this material came to Tarquinia from well-established trading networks that the Etruscans maintained within the Tyrrhenian Sea, and that connected to wider Greek and Phoenician networks running from the Levant in the East to southern Italy and Spain in the West.

Material goods and raw materials were not the only indicators of cultural exchange between Etruria and the wider Mediterranean. There was also an influx of people coming as traders, workmen, and those who sold their skills as painters and artisans. Beginning in the eighth century BCE, coastal Etruria experienced an inundation of Greek visual images, ideas,

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47 Boatwright, 28-31; Haynes, 50-52; Miles, 46-47, 96-111
and mythology coming from the colonization movement undertaken by large Greek cities to alleviate their overpopulation.\textsuperscript{48} Greek colonists settled in southern Italy and Sicily and continued their commercial interactions with the cities of Etruria. Later, Ionian Greeks fleeing western Anatolia in the sixth century BCE would make their ways into the central and western Mediterranean regions.\textsuperscript{49} These waves of Greeks, and the culture they brought with them, were interacting with the Etruscans at a crucial time in the development of Etruscan cultural elites.

The increase in commercial activity and the growing populations of the major cities of Etruria meant that Etruscan civilization was becoming more stratified, and that the elites of Etruria began to identify with elites across the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{50} This deep inculcation of Greek myth, and of Greek imagery and aesthetic in representing mythical narratives, is evident in Etruscan burial spaces built between the time of the first settlements of Magna Graecia and the conquest of central Italy by the Romans. Though influenced by Greeks, the Etruscan tombs also display elements of indigenous style and religious beliefs that have been integrated into a new cultural framework. A cursory view may mistake Etruscan cultural beliefs and use of Greek mythology as a wholesale adoption of the Greek culture in the place of a truly Etruscan one. Instead, the sequence of Etruscan cultural history as seen in burial spaces belies a much more nuanced adaptation and reconstitution of elements of Greek, Phoenician, indigenous, and Latin civilizations. The result is a wholly Etruscan culture, not merely identifiable copies of Greek cultural perspectives.

Early Etruscan tombs depict in vivid color the celebratory aspects of life in an idealized Etruria, with dancing, signing, feasting, and athletic competition all playing major roles. Early Etruscan tombs dating from the Orientalizing and Archaic periods (approximately 700 BCE –

\textsuperscript{48} Pomeroy et al., 100-115.
\textsuperscript{49} Bonfante (1986), 164, 203.
\textsuperscript{50} Haynes, 47-88; Malkin (1998), 156-177.
480 BCE) exhibit strong connections to the natural world, and the daily lives of Etruscan elites.\textsuperscript{51} Often the settings are outside, depicted using various plants and trees native to central Italy.

Groups of men and women are seen together either in generic celebratory contexts or in visual narratives of Greek mythology. The celebratory and banqueting scenes may actually be references to the funeral rituals associated with the placement of the dead in the tomb, rituals that would have prescribed the activities necessary for a happy burial on behalf of the dead, and the customary duties on behalf of the living.\textsuperscript{52} Many Etruscan tombs of this period also included objects, tools, and weapons associated with daily life, either painted, molded, or deposited into the architecture of the burial space.\textsuperscript{53} These objects were often bronze mirrors, jewelry, cooking pots, tripods, swords, shields, terra cotta models of Etruscan huts, cinerary urns, and even food products.\textsuperscript{54} Taken as a whole, these objects represent a rich afterlife that represented many of the best aspects of the previous lives the tombs’ occupants had enjoyed.

While generalized scenes of feasting and celebration appeared on early Etruscan tombs, the artistry of wall paintings was far from stagnant, as tombs changed over time to reflect the tastes of their owners, the changing influence of Greek culture as that culture itself developed and changed, and as religious beliefs evolved, especially during the Classical and Hellenistic periods dating from about 480 BCE until the advance of the Romans in the middle of the third century BCE. In this latter period, the artists working in Etruscan tombs reflect an increased interest in the Homeric myths, or in scenes not necessarily from the \textit{Iliad} or the \textit{Odyssey}, but in stories told about the Homeric heroes in other contexts.\textsuperscript{55} Achilles appears in several tombs from

\textsuperscript{51} Haynes, 47-260, Steingräber, 41-185.
\textsuperscript{52} Jannot, 34-53.
\textsuperscript{53} Steingräber, 63-128.
\textsuperscript{54} Dennis, 249-257. Specific examples include the Caere (modern Cervetri) Tomb of the Seats and Shields, and the much later Tomb of the Reliefs. The latter is contemporary with the Tomb of Orcus.
\textsuperscript{55} Haynes, 308-314; Steingräber, 129-280.
between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE, often in acts of vengeance or violence. In one tomb, the hero awaits the Trojan prince Troilus and his sister at a well where he will later kill them both, and according to some versions, rapes the prince before killing him, scenes not present in the Homeric tradition.\textsuperscript{56} In another tomb, Achilles executes several Trojan princes as the shade of Patroclus looks on, appearing to approve the sacrifice in his honor, a scene that appears in \textit{Iliad} XXIII.\textsuperscript{57}

Both stories signal a change in tone of Etruscan tombs over the course of three centuries. Beliefs about the afterlife, perhaps reflecting a growing gloominess about the political reality of central Italy, take on a darker, more pessimistic resonance. The dancers and celebrants are fewer in number, while the banqueting elites are in underworld settings, far from the idealized outdoor places in which they had been depicted in previous centuries. Instead, the banqueting moves to the underworld, where the participants are often displayed reclining on couches in the way the attendants at a symposium might appear, or the way elite Romans would dine in the subsequent centuries.\textsuperscript{58} The underworld context is unmistakable given the presence, sometimes as fellow guests, of Hades and Persephone, king and queen of the underworld and labeled with their Etruscan nomenclature. There also appears an ominous mist, the dark gloom surrounding the banqueters in both Orcus I and the contemporary Golini Tomb of Orvieto.\textsuperscript{59} The dark mist alludes to both the Homeric and Hesiodic traditions,\textsuperscript{60} and served as a metaphor for the growing feeling of gloominess that the Etruscans felt in terms of their afterlife beliefs, their power and

\textsuperscript{56} Steingräber, 91. The Tomb of the Bulls dates from the mid sixth century BCE and is located in the Monterozzi necropolis outside of Tarquinia.
\textsuperscript{57} Bonfante (1986), 90-92. The François Tomb is contemporary with the Tomb of Orcus II (late fourth century BCE) though it is located at Vulci, in northern Etruria. The execution of the 12 Trojan princes appears in Homer, \textit{Iliad}, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 23, pg. 445, lines 190-199.
\textsuperscript{58} Malkin, 156-175.
\textsuperscript{59} Steingräber, 185-244. Specifically the Golini Tomb, the Tomb of Orcus, and the Tomb of the Infernal Quadriga all exhibit depictions of the gloomy mist of the underworld.
\textsuperscript{60} Homer, \textit{Iliad}, trans. by Lombardo. Bk. 15, line 193; Hesiod, \textit{Theogony}, lines 751ff and 857.
influence giving way to the ambitions of Rome, and the decline of their sister culture in Greece as the Peloponnesian War slowly but catastrophically consumed Athens.  

The earliest part of the Tomb of Orcus, Orcus I, most likely dates from the fourth century BCE, although some scholars place it within an earlier context of the fifth century, and others closer to the time of Orcus II in the late fourth century. Due to the level of damage within Orcus I and associated with the Orcus III zone of destruction where Orcus I and Orcus II come together, assigning specific dates to any section of the Tomb of Orcus is problematic. Complicating the task of dating the original construction of the tomb is the fact that there may have been revisions to the original tomb, Orcus I, at the time Orcus II was constructed and adjoined. De Grummond presents this scenario, that when Orcus II had been constructed, it was later expanded into Orcus I, and that the frescoes of the earlier tomb were cut away and replaced, either wholly or in part. Although this may be true of the Orcus I wall directly adjacent to the wall of Orcus II, it seems much less likely that the fragmentary image on the far wall of Orcus I, the infernal banquet scene that includes the portrait of the lady Velia Velcha, is contemporary with the scenes of Orcus II. While both tombs reflect similarly blended beliefs of the Greeks and Etruscans, the scene in Orcus I is more similar to the Classical style, whereas the underworld panorama and myth cycle of Orcus II adheres to an evolved narrative that is closer to the later Hellenistic period of Etruscan history.

Similar to earlier tombs of Etruria, Orcus I depicts an afterlife banquet, complete with attendants. A black cloud just behind the deceased represents the gloominess of the underworld. A similar scene appears in Orvieto’s Golini Tomb (Figure 8), a mid-fourth century BCE elite burial space whose walls depict scenes of infernal banqueting, and the attendants, servants, and

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61 Pomeroy et al., 324-368.  
62 De Grummond (2006), 210-211.  
63 Steingräber, 245-280.
supplies necessary for the feast. The gloomy mist surrounds the participants, signaling the setting and its mood. Though whether the Golini Tomb pre- or post-dates Orcus I is unclear, they demonstrate similarities that declare them at least within a generation of one another. The Golini Tomb’s emphasis on food preparation and consumption, and the preponderance of servants completing what would have been actual jobs in life make it more likely that Golini pre-dates Orcus I. While earlier tombs have a greater connection to the celebratory feasts associated with burial customs, the lack of much of this imagery in Orcus I means that other themes were more important, whereas in the Golini Tomb the scene still echoes the celebratory atmosphere. Granted, the destruction of large chunks of Orcus I’s paintings means that this conclusion is based on weaker evidence.

The architecture of the internal burial space itself offers further evidence of Orcus I’s mid-fourth century BCE date. The location of the Tomb is away from others in the Monterozzi necropolis where earlier and definitively dated tombs reside as tumuli with the burial chamber only partially below ground. If the builders of the Tomb of Orcus needed to buy and use space further away from the ancient burial grounds of their ancestors, and they had to use a less advantageous space in the geography, it may signal that the most desirable spaces were already in use or owned by other elite families. Further, the shape of the internal burial spaces of Orcus signal that Orcus I was built before Orcus II due to the former’s more proportional square shape. Orcus II is more of an oblong rectangle, with the opening of Orcus III, the adjoining space, making the internal space even more irregular in shape. Even factoring out the opening of Orcus III, the internal space of Orcus II is wider than its length, unlike Orcus I, which is closer to a

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64 Dennis (Vol 2), 52-62; Steingräber, 211-215.
65 Recently, Italian scholars refer to the location of the Tomb of Orcus as the Fondo Scataglini necropolis to differentiate it from the Monterozzi site just across the street. See Federica Chiesa, Tarquinia: archeologia e prosopografia tra ellenismo e romanizzazione. Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2005, 89-90 for further explanation.
square. The shape and size of the internal space, along with the themes and chemistry of the paintings, suggest that Orcus I is rightly adjudged to be older than Orcus II, and that a connection between Orcus I and Orcus II’s burial chambers was opened after Orcus II had been constructed. Even given the disparate contexts of the two burial chambers’ themes, they still work together as a single unit in terms of an underworld existence for successive generations of a single family. Both tomb areas include imagery of death both as a theme and as a setting. While one side, Orcus I, includes ancestors’ final meal, the other side reflects the place of eternal existence for those ancestors’ shades.

Portraiture and the depiction of the deceased occurs exclusively in Orcus I, while the scenes of Orcus II’s walls are completely devoted to the heroes of Greek myth, and the nekyia of Odysseus. In this respect, the tomb works as a single interment space when taken with Orcus I and II together. Two possibilities may explain this synchronicity: that the two spaces reflect two different philosophies of the afterlife that were later joined to look like two distinct phases of the afterlife, or that the dating of the tomb is incorrect in that Orcus I and II are much more of a single unit built at the same time; or that Orcus I was refurbished to fit with Orcus II, as posited by de Grummond. The walls of Orcus I, though heavily damaged, do include broad indications that scenes of the deceased were prominent within the space. The contours of several people reclining on couches are discernable and the space is a combination of natural landscape set off by stylized trees and grape vines. The netherworld is seen in the gloomy mist surrounding those present. The figures of people, heavily draped if they are on the couches or nude if they are serving, are accompanied by rather lengthy inscriptions along the tops of the walls. Etruscologists interpret these inscriptions to be genealogical in nature and name the deceased, the
familial lines of the deceased, and the honorable titles held by them.\textsuperscript{66} While most of the characters’ faces are difficult to see through the damage, one image is eerily clear, that of an Etruscan noblewoman seen in profile and wearing jewelry, clothes, and a hairstyle that all identify her as a member of Tarquinia’s elite class. The inscription identifies her as the wife of the tomb’s owner and most likely one of its occupants as well. Her name appears as Velia Velcha, and her image is one of the defining characteristics of the tomb (Figure 3). One of the original accounts of her describe the profile of Velia thusly:

\begin{quote}
[She] has one of the most beautiful heads depicted in the tombs of Etruria. She has deep hazel eyes, rich auburn hair, and a profile of the ideal Greek type. She wears a double necklace, a chaplet of laurel leaves, and a yellow chemise, with a brown battlemented border. Of her name, inscribed above her, three letters only are left… Her figure is thrown out by a background of black rugged masses, somewhat resembling clouds, and clouds they may seem intended to represent, for these figures, as may be inferred from the proximity of the demon on the adjoining wall, represent the souls of those who were here interred, in a state of beatitude, rather than the said persons in the enjoyment of the pleasures of their earthly existence. In short, there is little doubt that we are here introduced to the Etruscan Hades or Orcus.

(Dennis, \textit{The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria (Vol. 1)}, pp. 346-348)
\end{quote}

In his description, Dennis (1883) touches upon a defining characteristic of the imagery of the Tomb of Orcus. The expression on the woman’s face is devoid of the delight and celebration seen in earlier Archaic and Orientalizing period tombs. Instead she has a serious and purposeful gaze, and her mouth curls down into an almost sneering expression of disdain. Certainly an absence of Etruscan optimism would make sense in the mid-fourth century BCE as Rome and Tarquinia witnessed the former’s ascension and the latter’s slow decline. Additionally, the attitude and beliefs about the afterlife expressed through the visual imagery of the tomb has

\textsuperscript{66} Haynes, 308-313.
much more in common with a bleak and dreary Hades than it does with the earlier expressions of cheerfulness. Conversely, upon seeing her for the first time, the English writer D. H. Lawrence was not an admirer. Lawrence objected to the portrait’s stylistic abandonment of the older Etruscan emphasis on music and celebration in favor of a more classical image.

Perhaps the favourite painting for representing the beauties of the Etruscan tombs is the well-known head of a woman, seen in profile with wheat-ears for a head-wreath, or fillet. This head comes from the Tomb of Orcus, and is chosen because it is far more Greek-Roman than it is Etruscan. As a matter of fact, it is rather stupid and self-conscious—and modern. But it belongs to the classic Convention, and men can only see according to a Convention. We haven’t exactly plucked our eyes out, but we’ve plucked out three-fourths of their vision.

(Lawrence, and Filippis, Sketches of Etruscan Places, pp. 130-131)

While Lawrence is reacting to the similarities of the portrait to Greek profile portraiture of the later Hellenistic period, he overlooks the elements of the image that make Velia Velcha Etruscan—her clothes, hair, setting, name, and her very presence and status at such a banquet.

The scene of the banquet continues across the wall from the right of the entrance and onto the adjoining wall that is across the room from the same door. In between, at the corner where the two walls meet, the demon creature known as Charun stands guard (Figure 13). The Etruscan Charun is often associated with the ferryman Charon of Greek myth, though the Etruscan figure has several features unique to its representation. Charun is less a porter of souls to the underworld and more a gatekeeper and embodiment of death himself—much closer to the idea of Thanatos in the Greek canon.67 Visually, Charun has bluish skin and a grotesque face with a hooked nose and sneering grin. His instrument is usually a torch or large mallet. While the exact function of the mallet is unclear, it may have to do with either a final blow to his victim

signifying the moment of death, or it may be useful in opening the gate between the world of the living and the world of the dead (Figures 11-12). Often in Etruscan funerary imagery, a door, gate, or dark entranceway serves as a reminder of the underworld beyond. Before the Hellenistic period, Etruscan artists were reluctant to show what exactly the realm of Hades looked like, and instead chose to draw the door and left the unknowable to the imagination of the viewer. The Tomb of Orcus does not use this approach, and instead Charun is shown on the other side of the infernal door while the occupant of the tomb is privy to the entire underworld landscape. Meanwhile, the calm yet disdainful expression of Velia Velcha comes into sharper contrast when compared to the gleeful expression on the twisted face of Charun, a character that almost relishes the task of tormenting the dead with eternal anguish. Such an expression is common for depictions of Charun, and may recall the hated nature of death in the Hesiodic song:

There the children of black night have their house,
Sleep and Death, awesome gods. Never does Helios
Glowing in his rays look upon these two
When he ascends the sky or from the sky descends.
One roams the earth and the wide back of the sea
A quiet spirit, and is gentle to humans;
The other’s heart is iron, unfeeling bronze,
And when he catches a man he holds on to him.
He is hateful even to the immortal gods.”
(Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. by Lombardo, p. 82, lines 763-771)

Hesiod underscores the darkness of the underworld in that Death is the offspring of night, nor does Helios ever look upon him. The absence of light signifies the presence of death. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the separation of sunlight and death is in even clearer terms when Odysseus’ men insolently eat the cattle of Helios, the sun. The Homeric tradition points out exactly how

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68 Jannot, 64.
69 Ibid, 67.
terribly the men have acted by threatening Zeus with the very destruction of the world order if the sailors are not punished. Helios says that, “If they don’t pay just atonement for the cows / I will sink into Hades and shine on the dead.”

The implication in the Sun’s threat is that the world of men and gods will be without the sun’s light—the light that causes crops to grow and the world to continue existing. Then, by going to the underworld to bring that life-giving light, Helios is really threatening to smash the wall between the land of the living and the land of the dead, and to reverse the nature of the universe. In a similar way, Charun stands ready with his mallet to both open the gates of death to let the deceased through to the underworld, and here in Orcus I, Charun stands guard to keep those dead souls within their proper context—reminding them that they are dead, and that their place is in the tomb. At this point, the less-than-cheerful expression of lady Velcha makes considerable sense.

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70 Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Book 12, p. 189, lines 393-394
Chapter 2: A Complex Tale of Tales: The Tomb of Orcus II

The frescoes of the Tomb of Orcus II represent the themes of rebirth and the supersession of death as told through specific episodes of Homer’s *Odyssey*, while still including elements of a traditional Etruscan funerary context. Three main scenes are depicted on the walls of Orcus II. The first includes a vivid representation of Odysseus and his men blinding the monstrous Cyclops. The second shows an Etruscan version of the deities Hades and Persephone holding court, attended by both Greek and Etruscan demons. The third and most transcendent scene includes several figures from Odysseus’s journey through Hades, Agamemnon and Tiresias being the most prominently featured. The collective narrative within the burial space uses carefully selected myths and imagery to reflect the Etruscan understanding of the underworld in the late fourth century BCE. The narrative also serves to lift the deceased from a mere Tarquinian elite family of means to a place among the greatest heroes of Greek mythology.\(^1\) The careful attention to status would serve not only the dead, but would associate the living members of the deceased’s family with those same Greek heroes of old. While this sort of heroism-by-association was nothing new among ancient Mediterranean elites,\(^2\) the context of the Tomb of Orcus is a particularly rich example. Additionally, the wall paintings of Orcus II include deep undertones of an Orphic or Pythagorean philosophy that emphasized the ideas of rebirth, regeneration, and the separation and reunification of the animate soul with the substantive living body. These ideas would have been attractive to the Tarquinian elites of the late fourth century

\(^1\) Malkin (1998), 156-177.
\(^2\) Miles, 96-111.
BCE, as some of them might have applied not just to their individual existences, but to the state of their civilization and its influence as well.

Determining the construction and dating of the Tomb of Orcus II is as problematic as with Orcus I, although the sequence of events seems to indicate that Orcus I was built first, similar in shape and size to previous Etruscan tombs, while Orcus II was built later.73 The best evidence for this is the destruction of the separation wall between the two tombs and in the subject matter and artistic style of the wall paintings. The former indicates a desire to open and expand the space of Orcus II, even at the expense of Orcus I’s remaining wall paintings, while the latter indicates a Hellenistic view of the underworld that is new to an Etruscan context.74 The visual imagery and subject matter both reflect contemporary vase painting taking place in Apulia.75 The presence of artisans from the Greek regions of southern Italy would not have been surprising at this time, as a coastal city like Tarquinia would have had long-established trade affiliations with cities all over Italy and Sicily, and the Etruscan elites had already been importing Greek pottery, materials, and workmen for centuries. Further, the owners of the tomb named in Orcus I’s lengthy inscription were known to have had connections to the Athenian invasion of Syracuse,76 and if the owners of Orcus I and Orcus II were members or generations of an extended family with connections to Greek Sicily, southern Italy, and Attica, then the prospect for Greek workmanship in Orcus II is very good.

Much like the paintings of Orcus I, those of Orcus II are heavily damaged and are, in some parts, either wholly missing or fragmentary. Some of this may be due to natural

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74 Steingräber, 245-280. Weber-Lehmann carefully analyzes several design elements to understand the dating of the tomb, including looking closely at how the artists depicted eyes.
76 Haynes, 310-317.
weaknesses in the rock walls, and some damage may have been done in antiquity either in an attempt to redesign the internal space, or in a purposeful defacement. Conclusive evidence is lacking in support of either possibility, except circumstantial interpretations of the damage itself. What is clear is that the construction of Orcus II at one point included a separate entrance from the outside, but that the owners of the tomb decided at some point to open the wall separating Orcus I and Orcus II to create a larger single, albeit irregular, burial space. The connecting hallway between the two tomb areas shows evidence that artisans attempted to coffer the ceiling there, though the job was left unfinished. Some scholars interpret this as an attempt to create Orcus III, a separate burial space within that hallway connecting Orcus I and Orcus II, while others view the space as an attempt to expand Orcus II to make room for additional deceased relatives. Still others believe that the owners of Orcus II wanted to destroy and replace the original images within Orcus I to conform to their design plans for Orcus II. What seems most likely, however, is that a later generation or offshoot of the Tarquinian family buried in Orcus I originally wanted an adjoining tomb, but decided instead to unite the two burial spaces as work on Orcus II continued. Like Orcus I, the literature for Orcus II shows a distinct lack of any record of grave goods or remains found inside the tomb, and so any interpretation of the themes conveyed by the artists and owners comes through the wall paintings. Here the tomb offers a complex set of episodes and images that create a single narrative.

First, the occupants of the tomb associate themselves with the heroism and fame of Odysseus, the greatest seafarer and storyteller of ancient Greek myth. Just as Odysseus gains fame and glory by his accomplishing great deeds and surviving terrible tribulation, so the tomb’s owners see themselves as part of a Mediterranean elite, a select group whose ancient roots and

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cultural enlightenment place them above all others into the realm of the heroes of the distant past. Like the stories Odysseus recounts to the Phaeacians, the factual accuracy of the narrative is less important than the telling of the story. The stories of Odysseus make him the many of many turns, whether what happens in them happened in reality. Just so, the placement of the ancient heroes in the tomb of this Etruscan family made the connection between the deceased and the myths, whether or not the occupants of the tomb truly deserved such acclaim. Second, the occupants of the tomb are placed into the Hades of the Homeric tradition. This placement eschews visual representations of the deceased in favor of the shades of the greatest heroes of *Odyssey* XI, along with the king and queen of the underworld, Hades and Persephone.

Attendant throughout the scenes in Orcus II are figures of Etruscan demonology, including Charun, the female death creature called Vanth, and the only known representation of the demon Tuchulcha, a particularly horrific character brandishing snakes. Third, the artists of Orcus II chose to depict a fully laden shelf full of vessels of many shapes and sizes, colored to represent bronze or gold, and attended by two male figures, both nude, one with wings and the other without (Figure 14). This scene is reminiscent of the previous ideology of the eternal banquet, as seen in both Orcus I and the Golini Tomb of Orvieto. While no depiction of a feast in progress appears, the appearance of so many vessels together with attendants may signal that preparations have been made and that the arrival of the deceased will prompt the feast to begin. Lastly and more opaquely, the signs are of an Orphic or Pythagorean approach to death, as seen in the myths of Geryon, Theseus and Pirithous, and in the broad *nekyia* scene that includes Agamemnon and the shade of Tiresias. Within this interpretation, one major character’s presence is as conspicuous as his absence. The greatest of all Greek, and by extension Mediterranean, heroes was Herakles, a character who either centrally or tangentially figures into all of the

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78 Malkin (1998), 156-177.
mythological scenes within Orcus II’s wall paintings. Herakles’ ability to elevate himself above the realm of mortals and into the atmosphere of Olympus is something that the elite owners of the Tomb of Orcus might ascribe to their religious and political outlooks. Just as the idea of a soul’s reincarnation might appeal to a personal fear of death, so might the idea of an Etruscan cultural and political rebirth appeal to a member of the Tarquinian elite.


Chapter 3: The Heroism of Odysseus

“My men lifted up the olivewood stake
And drove the sharp point right into his eye,
While I, putting my weight behind it, spun it around
The way a man bores a ship’s beam with a drill,
Leaning down on it while the other men beneath him
Keep it spinning and spinning with a leather strap.
That’s how we twirled the fiery-pointed stake
In the Cyclops’s eye.”

(Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 9, pg. 135, lines 380-387)

“They tried, but didn’t persuade my hero’s heart—
I was really angry—and I called back to him:

‘Cyclops, if anyone, any mortal man,
Asks you how you got your eye put out,
Tell him that Odysseus the marauder did it,
Son of Laertes, whose home is on Ithaca.’”

(Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 9, pg. 138-139, lines 498-503)

In a niche between Orcus I and II, the blinding of the Cyclops by Odysseus and his men is a striking image (*Figures 15-16*). When the tomb was first discovered, it was alternately called the Tomb of Polyphemus and the name ‘Tomb of Orcus’ refers to the Cyclops as an ogre, ‘orco’ being the Italian word for ogre.79 Later descriptions would mistake the name of the tomb for the name of the Roman god representing the underworld and the name for place itself. Instead, the name of the tomb makes reference to the image of the Cyclops. The monster is a grotesque and misshapen form, almost too big in size for the wall upon which it is drawn. Although the hero

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79 Dennis, 345.
Odysseus is only extant as a fragment, his Etruscan label makes the scene an unmistakable recounting of the end of Book IX of Homer’s *Odyssey*. The large, absurd figure of Cyclops reclines naked and on his back, while the sharpened stake is driven into his massive single eye, his shaggy hair illustrating the turbulence of the situation. In the background appears a clear way of escaping, through a single doorway. The artist included the exit door in the simplest terms—a black line to give the door form, and a slightly darker shade of gray inside the doorway to give it depth. Such a simple design, but its significance is much more complex. The door echoes the earlier Etruscan tomb depictions of false doors, or doorways to the underworld though which the deceased would pass upon their deaths. In this case, the doorway behind the Cyclops may represent not the entrance into an inescapable fate of bleak death, but a way out—an exit, and through it, life, hope, and further adventure.

The scene is so powerful in the context of Orcus II because it conveys a tremendous amount of information in a single image. By showing Odysseus at the moment he blinds the Cyclops, the artist has captured the essence of Odysseus’ heroism. Odysseus’ image, although badly damaged, is identifiable by fragments and by a partial inscription of his Etruscan moniker, ‘Uthuste.’ The tricky wanderer has invented, planned, and successfully carried out an escape from certain death, and he has done so in a way that allows for the men to safely exit the cave, but uses the Cyclops himself to help them. The brilliance of Odysseus is then illustrated by the use of rams to evade the Cyclops’ grasping hands, while punishing the monster for his evil deeds. As the Etruscan owners of the tomb would know, Odysseus then secures his glory in revealing himself and his name to the Cyclops as he puts to sea. The entire episode is the very beginning of a long sequence of events within the Homeric narrative that sees Odysseus survive

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80 Jannot, 61-65.
81 Haynes, 314.
seemingly impossible situations while building his reputation and the epic story that gives him his glory. The shouting of his name at the Cyclops is that key moment when Odysseus becomes Odysseus the hero. He has laid claim to the deed depicted on the wall of Orcus II, and he has invited more trial and tribulation upon himself and his men by provoking the Cyclops into cursing him in the name of Poseidon, his father. Had not Odysseus revealed his name, then the Cyclops would have had no means by which to curse him, nor would the name of Odysseus have been transmitted as the hero who blinded the beast. By means of a single image, a critical part of the Odyssey can be transmitted to an educated member of the elite, either Greek or Etruscan.

The artistry of the image is sometimes adjudged to be inferior to the other scenes due to the abnormal proportions of the Cyclops, though the image itself is more than an attempt to realistically portray a man blinding a one-eyed giant. Instead, the lack of proper proportions, the large size and distended belly, along with the shaggy hair and beard, are outward signs of the monster’s terrible nature. In the Homeric tradition, Cyclops perverts the entire nature of the guest-host relationship and rather than welcoming in strangers, he traps them and eats them. Terrible variations of this theme appear elsewhere in Greek myth and theater, several of which include stories about the House of Atreus—both Tantalus and Atreus betray their kin in the most horrific ways. The presence of Agamemnon around the corner on a different wall echoes this theme nicely without having to portray any additional images of the myths of hospitality gone wrong. In showing the horrible nature of the Cyclops in visual form, the artist also allows Odysseus to be seen as an instrument of divine retribution against a savage beast that did not adhere to civilized customs. This message may have resonated with the occupants of the tomb, particularly if they have been involved in military campaigns against hostile forces that can be associated with the Cyclops and his homeland, i.e. Sicily.

82 Dennis, 349-350.
Odysseus was a meaningful figure for the Etruscans. Like Achilles, Herakles, Theseus, or Aeneas, Odysseus is a foundational character by which civilizations other than Greeks, or later generations of Greeks, connect their civilizations or their elites with the Bronze Age heroes of mythology. In doing so, civilizations like the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, the city-states of Magna Graecia, the Romans, and the Etruscans are able to give themselves a prestige and historical depth that places them alongside the most glorious peoples of the Mediterranean. Such prestige lends legitimacy to endeavors like establishing and controlling trade networks, settling new colonies, demanding tribute from lesser civilizations, and conquering and dominating areas outside their original territories. That the Etruscans would adopt much of the canon of Greek mythology, along with its visual imagery, literature, and oral tradition, makes sense considering the development of major cities in Etruria occurred just as the Greeks were emerging from the Dark Ages. Villanovan Iron Age hut villages in central Italy slowly evolved into highly stratified cities, with the wealth of the elites fueled in part by newly expanded trade networks throughout the Tyrrhenian and connecting to the wider Mediterranean. As the Greeks had been trading around the Mediterranean in the time of the Bronze Age, their culture had become a kind of common language, so that the characters and episodes of Greek myth were, once learned, a useful shorthand for transferring complex ideas and cultural norms. That so much of the luxury goods imported from the Greeks depicted the same Greek characters and myths only deepened Etruscan inculcation. While this deep cultural diffusion began in earnest at the beginning of the sixth century BCE, it continued and evolved over the course of several centuries.

84 Dennis, 352-354.
85 Haynes, 13-88.
86 Miles, 96-111.
87 Pomeroy et al., 89-101.
The affiliation of Etruscans with the Greek hero Odysseus was a way for Etruscan elites to insert themselves into an ancient and respected narrative, and to do so using openings in the plot of the *Odyssey* that were already available for such interpretation. The wandering of Odysseus may have taken a circuitous route around the western Mediterranean, and the Etruscans were able to view themselves as descendents of the hero as a result of his activities in Italy and Sicily. Even a text as old as the *Theogony* mentions children of Odysseus born to him by both Circe and Calypso, two female deities whose homes, according to some accounts, were thought to be far from Greece in the western Mediterranean. Both Romans and Etruscans pointed to this aspect of Odysseus’ journey that is not mentioned by the Homeric tradition.

And Circe, daughter of Hyperion’s son Helios,
Loved enduring Odysseus and bore to him
Agrios and Latinos, faultless and strong,
And bore Telegonos through golden Aphrodite.
In a far off corner of the holy islands
They ruled over the famous Tyrsenians.
And the bright goddess Kalypso bore to Odysseus
Nausithoos and Nausinoos after making sweet love.
(Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. by Lombardo, pg. 89-90, lines 1019-1026)

Hesiod describes the descendants of the union of Circe and Odysseus as ‘Tyrsenians,’ a term that calls to mind the appellation both Herodotus and Thucydides give the Etruscans, ‘the Tyrrhenians,’ or the people who live by the Tyrrhenian Sea. While the blending of myth and history makes a definitive interpretation difficult, precisely this gray area allows Etruscan elites to point to their interpretation as a correct account of their origins, and of their place among

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ancient, established cultures. Herodotus offers a more detailed, though unprovable, account of the origins of the Etruscans, and of their designation as ‘Tyrrenians,’ tracing them back to Lydia in Anatolia and connecting them to a more ancient culture that suffered mass migration to found a new civilization—a narrative that will be the central theme of Virgil’s *Aeneid* several centuries later. Herodotus describes the origin of the name:

> They sailed past the lands of many peoples until they finally reached the land of the Ombrikoi [a place generally associated with modern Umbria, in Italy], where they halted, built cities, and still dwell to this day. Moreover, they changed their name from Lydians to Tyrrhenians, to commemorate the king’s son [Tyrrhenos] who had led their expedition.\(^89\)

The practice of an Etruscan member of the elite connecting his personal character with the greatness of Odysseus may be seen in a late seventh or early sixth century BCE pyxis made of ivory and found in a funerary context in the Etruscan city of Chiusi.\(^90\) On it, various reliefs show the hero Odysseus clinging to the underside of a ram to escape the Cyclops cave, a scene of Odysseus’ ships at sea, and the monster Skylla seen in the distance. On the same pyxis on a lower register, there appears to be a funeral procession for the deceased. Though the artistry of the object is highly skilled, the nature and themes the pyxis displays were not uncommon for the context in which it was found. By linking the deceased to the specific episodes of the *Odyssey*, the dead could highlight important values such as bravery, cunning, strength, endurance, and wisdom. In this way, the image of a specific narrative becomes a type of visual language through which an artist could convey a tremendous amount of cultural information, including values, education, religious beliefs, and aspirations. In the Tomb or Orcus II, a similar dialogue exists

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\(^89\) Herodotus, *Histories*, I.94  
\(^90\) Haynes, 110 and **110**, Fig. 91.
between the occupant of the tomb and the painting of Odysseus blinding Polyphemus on the wall. The underlying assumption of the entirety of the burial space is that it is occupied by the heroic dead, by people who are conspicuously connected to the history of Odysseus. This theme takes a darker turn, as around the corner from the Cyclops image appears the underworld of *Odyssey XI*. 
Chapter 4: The Nekyia of Odysseus

“But there is another journey you must make first—
To the house of Hades and dread Persephone,
To consult the ghost of Theban Tiresias,
The blind prophet, whose mind is still strong.
To him alone Persephone has granted
Intelligence even after his death.
The rest of the dead are flitting shadows.”

(Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 10, pg. 155, lines 512-518)

The longest wall of the Tomb of Orcus II allows for the greatest single uninterrupted scene painted inside the burial space, that representing Book XI of Homer’s *Odyssey*. The most visible characters are Agamemnon and the shade of Tiresias, the blind prophet, though others are seen in fragmentary form or known by an Etruscan label, including Ajax and the small wing tip of an Etruscan underworld character like Vanth (*Figure 17*). One of the sharpest contrasts between the scene of Odysseus blinding the Cyclops and this panorama of the underworld is the perspective from which it may be viewed. Odysseus appears as a main character in the former, with the viewer merely a spectator, while in the latter scene, the viewer is in the place of *Odysseus*, or at least in the place of someone listening to his tale. Here now the connection between the mythical hero and the deceased occupant of the tomb is so complete that their points of view are the same. The dead Etruscan sees what Odysseus saw, and is able to interact with the noble dead in the same way Odysseus did. Unfortunately, like all of the wall paintings in the Tomb or Orcus, the underworld scene is also damaged and must be interpreted through
incomplete information. What does remain on this wall includes the two characters of *Odyssey*’s underworld with the most valuable information for the hero—both Tiresias and Agamemnon give the wandering Odysseus powerful warnings about the future ahead.

Though he is a character from Greek myth, the blind seer Tiresias held a special place in the Etruscan mind. Etruscans were known for their interest in haruspicy, the examination of entrails in pursuit of omens, so much so that the Romans revered the Etruscans’ skills in this respect long after the political autonomy of Etruria was eliminated and the Etruscan cities were Roman possessions. Evidence of this Etruscan reputation for this type of spirituality and fortune telling exists for several centuries before the construction of the Tomb of Orcus II, though the person of Tiresias presents it here in a Hellenistic form. Tiresias appears clothed in an intricate robe, hooded to represent his spirituality, holding a stick and with eyes closed to symbolize his blindness. The Etruscan inscription above Tiresias labels him in a way unique to the tomb, as “the shade of Tiresias.” All other labels are single names: ‘Odysseus,’ ‘Cyclops,’ ‘Agamemnon,’ and ‘Hades,’ are most prominent. The artist specifically chose to refer to Tiresias’ *shade* and not just his name. The *Odyssey* offers a clue into this special status that Tiresias holds in the Homeric underworld:

“The blind prophet, whose mind is still strong.
To him alone Persephone has granted
Intelligence even after his death.
The rest of the dead are flitting shadows.”
(Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 10, pg. 155, lines 515-518)

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91 Jannot, 18-33.
92 Pliny the Elder (11.186) and Cicero’s *De Divinatione* both mention the Etruscan art of fortune telling, and Plutarch’s account of the assassination of Julius Caesar (*Caesar*, 65.5) have him being warned, “Beware the Ides of March,” by an Etruscan haruspex named Spurinna.
93 Steingräber, 209.
Odysseus travels to the land of the dead specifically to see Tiresias, and while he has enlightening conversations with many of the heroes there, he allows only Tiresias to drink the blood of his sacrifices and to speak first, holding off even his own mother. The impact of the seer’s words is paramount above all others in the narrative because he gives Odysseus information to help him escape an ignominious death, and instructs the hero on the way forward. While the *Odyssey* explicitly refers to Odysseus’ death in the future, at the conclusion of his adventures, the danger Tiresias describes is very different. The ‘proper’ death for Odysseus is at the end of a very long life, and far away from his home but with his fame intact, and upon completion of a correct sacrifice to Poseidon. Tiresias warns Odysseus of the punishment of the gods that might strike him for committing sacrilege—the eating of Helios’ cattle. If Odysseus does commit such a crime, and dies like his men in the waters off Thrinacria, then his homecoming would be denied to him, and with it his glorious epic and his ‘gentle’ death.

The term for shade, ‘hinthial’ in Etruscan, appears rarely with two notable exceptions. In the François Tomb at Vulci dating from the same time period as the Tomb of Orcus, the late fourth century BCE, Achilles is shown sacrificing Trojans to the shade of Patroclus. While Patroclus watches this act of revenge in his honor, the presence of Agamemnon, Charun, and Vanth add to the grim and solemn nature of the act. Labeling the soul of Patroclus emphasizes that though dead, he is still present in some form, and is still able to interact with the living. In this way, Tiresias too is able to communicate with the living and his soul is still present in a way that the other dead are not.

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94 Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 11, pg. 161, lines 119-136. Tiresias foretells of “A death so gentle, and carry you off / When you are worn out in sleek old age…” after the proper sacrifices are made to Poseidon.

95 De Grummond, 161.

96 Jannot, 54.
In another depiction of the soul of Tiresias, a bronze mirror of the mid fourth century BCE in the Vatican Museums collection (Figure 21), the blind prophet leans on the god Hermes who facilitates the conversation between the shade of Tiresias and Odysseus, shown seated and with his sword help upright. The scene is an interesting twist on the Homeric tradition in that the presence of Hermes is needed in his role of psychopompus, perhaps denoting the special nature of Tiresias’ intelligent soul. Tiresias’ eyes are closed in an expression of blindness, though unlike in the Tomb of Orcus, he is smooth-faced and wearing a simple garment. He does carry a walking stick. Both the androgynous face and the walking stick may echo other myths concerning the origins of Tiresias’ special abilities of foresight and understanding. According to Apollodorus, Tiresias experienced life both as male and as female in a bizarre sequence of events that began with the seer striking two mating snakes with his walking stick. By living as both, Tiresias gained insight into human existence foreign even to the gods, as in some versions he was trying to settle a dispute between Hera and Zeus as to which sex enjoyed the act of intercourse more.

While the story of Tiresias’ chance encounter with the coupling snakes and his gender reassignments is not universal, all versions of his blindness agree that his powers of prophecy were divinely granted. Several agree that the ability to know the future was as compensation for the loss of his physical vision, and given that the ability came from an immortal source, it would fit that even after his death, Tiresias’ insight would endure.

Now there lived amongst the Thebans a diviner, Teiresias, son of Everes and the nymph Chariclo. He was a descendant of Oudaios, one of the Spartoi, and had lost the use of his eyes; on how he came to be blind and gained prophetic powers, conflicting stories are told. Some say that he was blinded by the gods because he

97 De Grummond, 166-169 and 168, Figure VIII.27.
98 Apollodorus III.6.7.
divulged to the human race what they wanted to keep concealed. Or according to Phererecydes, he was blinded by Athene; for Athene and Chariclo were close friends [and it came about that he] saw the goddess completely naked, and she covered his eyes with her hands, depriving him of his sight.

(Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. by Hard, Bk. 3, Ch. 6.7ff)

“It was not I who struck your son blind. Putting out young eyes is not sweet to Athena, but the laws of Kronos demand that whoever sees an immortal against the god’s will must pay for the sight, and pay dearly.”

(Callimachus, *Hymn V*, trans. by Lombardo and Raynor, p. 35, lines 122-126)

As attitudes about the underworld changed to reflect a gloomier outlook on death, and an increased interest in the Homeric tradition in the fourth century BCE, southern Italian vase painters out of Lucania and Apulia used imagery from the *Odyssey* more frequently, along with other characters of Classical Age Greek drama such as Agamemnon and Medea. At the same time, interest in Orphic and Pythagorean ideas began to develop in western Greece and southern Italy. One mid-third century southern Italian vase depicts the *nekyia* of Odysseus with the hero seated on a rock and flanked by two comrades (Figure 22). The head of Tiresias appears from below him is a ghostly apparition alongside the sacrificed animals whose blood allows him to speak.99 The scene certainly derives from the Homeric description of the encounter between the hero and the blind prophet:

“You yourself draw your sharp sword and sit there, Keeping the feeble death-heads from the blood Until you have questioned Tiresias. Then, and quickly, the great seer will come. He will tell you the route and how long it will take For you to reach home over the teeming deep.”

99 Bottini, Iff.
While the scene generally conforms to the Homeric tradition, Angelo Bottini of the French School of Rome sees echoes of the Orphic cult and Pythagorean ideas concerning the reanimation of the living soul even after the death of the body. Bottini speculates that the large krater would have belonged to an initiate in the area of Metapontum,\textsuperscript{100} where such ideas arrived with traders and settlers from areas of mainland Greece, spreading from the south coast of the Italian peninsula and making headway in Etruscan coastal towns by means of well-established trade networks. As the Dolon krater dates from a few decades before the Tomb of Orcus II, the Orphic philosophy may very well have penetrated Tarquinian elite social circles, including the artisans and owners of Orcus II, and that there may have been an effort to incorporate the philosophy, even in a modified form, into the ornamentation of the space. A bronze mirror found at Chiusi and dating from about 300 BCE reinforces the case for an Orphic interpretation of Tiresias’ role on the Dolon krater.\textsuperscript{101} In an image reminiscent of the disembodied head of Tiresias prophesying to the seated Odysseus, the mirror presents a similarly disembodied head speaking to a convocation of listeners and recorders. The head is labeled as that of Orpheus, and conforms to the idea presented by Philostratos that once dismembered, the head of Orpheus continued to produce oracular pronouncements even as it floated down the river.\textsuperscript{102}

Next to the seer Tiresias is the bandaged and simply dressed Agamemnon, painted with long, curly blond hair and a dark beard. He is identified by a partially damaged label next to him, and by the prominence with which he attends the scene, although this identification was not part of the original publication of the finding of the tomb. Instead, Dennis (1883) identified the

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} De Grummond, 33-37 and 33, Figure II.10.
\textsuperscript{102} Philostratus, \textit{Heroicus} 28, 8-9.
character as “‘MEMRUN,’ which can be no other than the handsome son of Aurora, ‘the divine Memnon.’”\textsuperscript{103} This misidentification may be due to the fragmentary nature of the inscription, of which the first few letters are missing. In \textit{Odyssey} XI, Odysseus converses at length with the slain king, mostly about the events following Agamemnon’s homecoming. In contrast to the successful \textit{nostos} that Odysseus will enjoy as foreshadowed by Tiresias, Agamemnon has suffered a most cruel perversion of his \textit{nostos}. Having been murdered by his wife and his cousin, her lover, Agamemnon nurses both his wounds and his anger in the underworld. His main message to Odysseus, to beware of women and especially of one’s wife, is a sharp contrast to the reality of Odysseus’ marriage. Here the bandages around Agamemnon’s chest and shoulder reflect the imagery of the shade of Patroclus from the François Tomb. There, as he watches the sacrificial slaughter in his honor, the shade of Patroclus appears under the wing of an infernal Vanth. He wears similar bandages and watches Achilles’ action along with Agamemnon. Some scholars believe that the scene in the François Tomb hints at the shade’s need for blood in order to communicate with the living,\textsuperscript{104} just as Achilles offers to Patroclus, so did Odysseus sacrifice to Tiresias in Hades, allowing the blind seer to drink the blood and then speak his piece. Though the scenes deal with different events within the greater Homeric tradition, the two scenes appear in burial spaces less than 20 miles apart and from the same part of the late fourth century BCE. While scant evidence exists for human sacrifice among the Etruscans, animal sacrifice was a fundamental part of Etruscan spirituality as practiced by the class of haruspices.\textsuperscript{105}

Agamemnon serves a dual role in the context of Orcus II. Like the scene of Odysseus blinding the Cyclops, the presence of Agamemnon in itself connects the elite Etruscan occupant of the tomb to another great hero of ancient times, and in this instance, the Greek king who led

\textsuperscript{103} Dennis, 352.
\textsuperscript{104} De Grummond, 198-199.
\textsuperscript{105} Haynes, 178-180; Jannot, 18-33.
the forces at Troy, eventually sacking the city and winning glory. Surely for a proud Tarquinian family, the sacking of a great city by enemy forces would have both aspirational tones with respect to Rome or Syracuse, and more ominous undercurrents given the contemporary situation in central Italy.\textsuperscript{106} Agamemnon also serves as a foil for both Odysseus in his retelling of his interaction with his old leader, and for the family members buried in the Tomb of Orcus. Just as Agamemnon narrates the sad fate he experienced upon his return home, his death by means of his dysfunctional marriage and his cursed bloodline, so Odysseus may feel better about his faithful Penelope at home, the antithesis of tricky, murderous Clytemnestra. In this respect, Agamemnon is a symbol of the successful marriage marked by loyalty and longevity because he represents the very worst of what may happen, and offers a clear contrast with anything other than the worst. He laments his doom to Odysseus:

\begin{quote}
“Aegisthus was the cause of my death.  
He killed me with the help of my cursed wife  
After inviting me to a feast in his house,  
Slaughtered me like a bull at a manger.  
...  
I lifted my hands and beat the ground  
As I lay dying with a sword in my chest,  
But that bitch, my wife, turned her back on me  
And would not shut my eyes or close my lips  
As I was going down to Death. Nothing  
Is more grim or more shameless than a woman  
Who sets her mind on such an unspeakable act  
As killing her own husband.”
\end{quote}

(Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 11, pg. 170, lines 420ff)

One of the darkest elements of the murder of Agamemnon is the refusal of Clytemnestra to undertake the appropriate rituals for the dead, something that any Etruscan would understand.

\textsuperscript{106} Haynes, 327-332; Miles, 157-159.
and repudiate.\textsuperscript{107} Once again, the Agamemnon’s story demonstrates the correct way to act by showing the horrific consequences of wrong behavior that contravenes all social convention. The theme of proper ritual practices, particularly when burying the dead, is a central concern for Agamemnon, just as for Achilles, Patroclus, Hector, Priam, and most of the heroes of the Homeric tradition. The highly organized and planned necropoleis of the major Etruscan cities all point to a civilization that was as deeply concerned with funerary ritual as any in the Mediterranean. In the \textit{Odyssey}, the importance of ritual is reiterated throughout Odysseus’ \textit{nekyia}. Once the hero reaches the underworld, he must perform ritual sacrifice to the gods to ensure the success of the mission. Odysseus performs the rites over a pit, from which the ghosts of the dead will drink sheep’s blood and gain the strength to speak to him.

“There Perimedes and Eurylochus held the victims
While I dug an ell-square pit with my sword,
And poured libation to all the dead,
First with milk and honey, then with sweet wine,
And a third time with water. Then I sprinkled
White barley and prayed to the looming dead.”
\textsuperscript{108} (Homer, Odyssey, Book 11, p. 158-159, lines 23-28)

Aside from these initiation rites, the wandering hero is reminded of the importance of proper burial of the dead in a chance encounter with a recently lost crewmember. At the outset of his journey though the underworld, Odysseus is unaware that one of his men lies dead and unburied. Upon meeting him and drinking the blood of the sacrificed animals, Elpenor tells Odysseus, “Do not leave me unburied, unmourned, / When you sail for home, or I might become / A cause of the gods’ anger against you.”\textsuperscript{108} These two scenes illustrate the narrative’s lesson

\textsuperscript{107} Jannot, 34-53.
\textsuperscript{108} Homer, Odyssey, Book 11, p. 160, lines 68-70.
that the living owe the dead. The dead need the living to perform burial rites and to mourn them, or they are restive in the underworld, causing an upset in the proper functioning of both worlds, that of the living and that of the dead. Just as the Phaeacians listened to Odysseus recount the cautionary tale of Agamemnon, here in Orcus II Agamemnon himself represents the danger of a discordant or depraved family life, and thereby validates the listener whose life is already upright.

“But if you still yearn to listen, I will not refuse
To tell you of other things more pitiable still,
The woes of my comrades who died after the war,
Who escaped the Trojans and their battle-cry
But died on their return through a woman’s evil.”
(Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 11, pg. 169, lines 390-394)

While Tiresias and Agamemnon present contrasting views of the underworld and offer the deceased different narratives on the function of the relationship between the living and the dead, the image between the two characters suggests a more complicated set of ideas about the underworld and the afterlife. Behind Agamemnon, Tiresias, and the other heroic dead whose images only exist in fragments, appear at least three large plants, yellowish in color and devoid of leaves. They most likely represent marsh reeds that might grow along the infernal rivers Styx and Acheron. On the tree between Agamemnon and Tiresias, six tiny humanoid forms are shown frolicking in silhouette, their bodies in dynamic motion as they leap, climb, and dive from branch to branch (Figure 18). No scholarly consensus exists about the meaning of these tiny human figures bouncing among the tree branches, although most believe they are either compatriots of Agamemnon, souls of the lesser dead, or *eidōla* that represent the souls of those yet born.109 The

109 De Grummond, 211; Haynes, 313; Jannot, 67; Steingräber, 209.
latter interpretation makes the best sense both in the context of the room and in the wider canon of Etruscan philosophy of the late fourth century BCE. The souls speak to an Orphic or Pythagorean interpretation of the endurance of the human spirit long after the physical body is gone, and offers an intellectual basis for the hope that rebirth or at least reanimation of the soul of the deceased might be possible.

While the general atmosphere of Orcus II is gloomy and pensive about death, the movement of the tiny bodies in the background stands out for its dynamism. In keeping with the Homeric narrative that informs most of the imagery of Orcus II, the appearance and motion of the shadowy souls recalls the description of dozens of slain suitors following Hermes psychopompus down into Hades:


\textit{Bats deep inside an eerie cave}
\textit{Flit and gibber when one of them falls}
\textit{From the cluster clinging to the rock overhead.}

So too these ghosts, as Hermes led them
Down the cold, dank ways, past
The streams of Ocean, past the White Rock,
Past the Gates of the Sun and the Land of Dreams,
Until they came to the Meadow of Asphodel,
Where the spirits of the dead dwell, phantoms
Of men outworn.

(Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, trans. by Lombardo, Book 24, p. 365, lines 7-16)

The movement of the small figures has the body language and mood of something other than the doom that the souls of the suitors might have felt. Instead, their movements are closer to the colorful description of George Dennis: “The tree, with its tiny inhabitants, strongly reminded me of the bamboo clumps I have often seen in South America, swarming with marmosets and
“Sackiwinkies.” Six such figures bounce around in the branches of the tree behind Agamemnon and Tiresias, and the two men make no indication that they are either aware of or interested in the presence of the jumping little souls (Figure 18). They are reminiscent of the earliest Etruscan tombs, with its dancing, jumping, and overall celebratory quality. Such an attitude makes sense if there were something to celebrate, and the introduction of the Pythagorean ideas surrounding reanimation of the soul into Etruscan afterlife beliefs certainly would allow for such an opening. Whether such reanimation in this instance refers to a personal rebirth of the tomb’s occupants or to a generalized resurgence of the Tarquinian civilization is unclear, and possibly a purposeful ambiguity.

Though the wall painting of the infernal landscape offers only glimpses of the characters present aside from Agamemnon and the shade of Tiresias, one partially obscured figure is labeled as Telamonian Ajax, the second best of the Greeks. He serves to further connect the elite occupants of the tomb to the cast of heroic dead. He also serves a role in the Homeric Odyssey akin to that of Agamemnon. Though he never speaks to Odysseus, ostensibly out of anger for Odysseus’ having cheated him out of the armor of Achilles, a prize that he could legitimately claim as his own, his presence is reflective of the greatness of Odysseus. Ajax is a reminder not just of the events at Troy, but that Odysseus is the greatest of all heroes; he was able to use cunning to take the armor of Achilles and proved himself as more powerful than mere physical force. While Ajax is a tale in self-consuming anger and resentment, he highlights the fame and importance of Odysseus.

“Only the ghost of Telamonian Ajax
Stood apart, still furious with me

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110 Dennis, 352. ‘Sackiwinkie’ is an antiquated term for the common squirrel monkey, native to the tropical forests of Central and South America.
Because I had defeated him in the contest at Troy
To decide who would get Achilles’ armor.”
(Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 11, pg. 174, lines 569-572)

In referencing the armor of Achilles, Ajax also highlights the absence of the great runner from this collection of heroic dead. One reason may be that this tomb is clearly thematic of the Homeric *Odyssey*, not the *Iliad*. The Etruscan noble family has decided to move away from the militarism and praise for physical strength represented by Achilles and instead have decided to focus on the craftiness and heroism of Odysseus. The nature of Achilles in the Homeric *Iliad* differs from the mood of Orcus II. Rather than celebrate the glory of a young death in pursuit of great deeds, this tomb falls more in line with the solemnity of Achilles’ appearance in Book XI of the *Odyssey*. At a time when the Etruscan civilization seemed destined for a slow decline, the idea of one’s name carrying the greatness of one’s deeds in perpetuity was an unreliable bet. Without his appearance on the wall, the words Achilles speaks in Hades in the *Odyssey* are fitting for the gloomy dark of Orcus II. At the end of the epic, Agamemnon tries to remind Achilles of his far-reaching fame and glory, assuring the great warrior that the sacrifice of his life was worth the lasting reputation he left behind, accentuating the proper funeral rites that were observed for the warrior.

“Godlike Achilles, you did have the good fortune
To die in Troy, far from Argos. Around you fell
Some of the best Greeks and Trojans of their time,
Fighting for your body, as you lay there…

…
And the Muses, all nine, chanted the dirge,
…
For seventeen days we mourned you like that,
Men and gods together. On the eighteenth day
We gave you to the fire, slaughtering sheep
And horned cattle around you.

...You were very dear to the gods.
Not even in death have you lost your name,
Achilles, nor your honor among men.”
(Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 24, pg. 366-367, lines 38-41ff)

Despite Agamemnon’s words of Achilles’ glorious burial, when Odysseus met the shade of Achilles in Book XI, he turned dark and assured his old comrade that he would rather be the lowliest servant on earth, alive, than the greatest of the heroic dead. Though the idea of the life of a low servant would be unlikely to attract the Etruscan elite, the Orphic philosophy might alleviate some of the misery that eternal death brings. For Achilles, the only thing that brings him consolation is news of his son, Neoptolemus, the next generation. Upon hearing of the exploits of his son, Achilles’ mood changes and he moves off, “filled with joy at his son’s preeminence.”

The long genealogical and titular inscriptions found in many of the Etruscan elites’ tombs speak to their interest in familial pride, and the importance of maintaining the name, prestige, and fortunes of the family generation after generation. This may also be seen as a way for the deceased to live on—each successive generation carries the name and history of all previous ones. And, as Odysseus had brought news of Neoptolemus to Achilles, so the souls of the deceased in Hades are able to receive news about the happenings of their surviving relatives and are either pleased or dismayed by what they hear. Later, when the souls of the suitors flood down into Hades in the last book of the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon once again engages in contrast. When the suitors inform him of the events in the halls of Odysseus upon the hero’s return, and of the faithfulness of Penelope, Agamemnon cannot help but curse out his own wife for her

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111 Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 11, pg. 174, line 566.
faithlessness. The dead are able to understand and react to events occurring in the world of the living, just as they carry the joy or resentment of past events with them down to Hades.

“That was the drift of their talk as they stood
In the Dark Lord’s halls deep under the earth.”
(Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 24, pg. 371, lines 211-212)
Chapter 5: The Conspicuous Absence of Herakles

The scenes depicted on the walls of the Tomb of Orcus II, when taken as a single group, reflect the presence of one Greek hero and the absence of another. While Odysseus appears in the scene of him and his men blinding the Cyclops, the great hero Herakles appears nowhere on the walls of the Tomb of Orcus.\(^{112}\) Despite the absence of any visual image of Herakles, his presence is nonetheless demonstrable within the narrative cycle of the burial space—a narrative that would have required substantial background knowledge on behalf of the viewer, a mythological appreciation that the owners and artists of Orcus II assuredly had. Just as the imagery of Odysseus, both his heroism and his descent into Hades, allowed the owners of Orcus II to connect themselves to a foundational hero of Greek myth, adopted by the Etruscan civilization as one of its founders, so too do the multiform and numerous connections to Herakles offer a divine heroic correlation. On a deeper level, both heroes also offer the impossible—the triumph of mortals over death, the ultimate obstacle. While Odysseus completes his *nekyia* in *Odyssey* XI, Herakles conquers death by kidnapping the infernal hound Cerberus, and he rescues others from the undergloom, making himself immortal through his great deeds—deeds that earn him a place on Olympus. A careful examination of the interplay among the myths depicted thus allows a clearer accounting of Herakles’ role to emerge.\(^{113}\)

\(^{112}\) Jannot, 66-67 mentions that “old drawings” show the presence of several other mythological characters not attested to elsewhere. From “shreds of flaking paint,” the identification of Achilles, Cerberus, Herakles and Sisyphus are not exactly reliable; Steingraber, 209 also refers to Sisyphus, Herakles, and “a hydra, or more likely Cerberus,” though he does not include images or cite the source of the specific identification.

\(^{113}\) One of the main roles Herakles played in foundational myth was the clearing of land from monsters and uncivilized barbarians to facilitate the establishment of true civilization, usually marked by Greek cultural supremacy. One detailed account of the civilizing aspects of Herakles’ adventures comes from Diodorus Siculus, IV.17.3ff.
While Odysseus is clearly present within the tomb’s context and in its visual imagery, Herakles is present in its context but not in its art. Herakles figures prominently in three of the four walls’ myths in ways that make his absence either purposeful on the part of the tomb’s painters, or as a result of the heavy damage the tomb has sustained over the centuries. Because the tomb’s architecture is not clearly delineated and is the result of at least two distinct periods of construction, along with a partial collapse of the central area between burial spaces, knowing for sure whether the image of Herakles was ever a part of the original design is impossible. He is, however, a unifying story element within the entire cycle of myth on the walls of Orcus II. He appears to Odysseus among the heroic dead in Book XI of the *Odyssey* though the two heroes do not speak to one another. Herakles exists within the realm of Hades in a bifurcated way—his being is at once deceased and present in the underworld as a typical shade, while at the same time his character and deeds have elevated part of his soul to the heights of Olympus where he feasts with the gods and enjoys the company of his Zeus-given wife, Hebe.

“And then mighty Heracles loomed up before me—
His phantom that is, for Heracles himself
Feasts with the gods and has as his wife
Beautiful Hebe, daughter of great Zeus
And gold-sandaled Hera.”

(Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 11, pg. 176, lines 630-633)

Hesiod confirms the sublime fate of Herakles in the *Theogony* as something attractive to any human—a life of great accomplishment rewarded by the gods with an eternal divine feast, idealized marriage, and worldwide fame. The outcome of the hero’s journey must have been especially attractive to an Etruscan nobleman of Tarquinia, bearing witness to the steady decline of his civilization while the dominance of Rome seemed inevitable.
And Herakles, Alkmene’s mighty son,
Finished with all his agonizing labors,
Made Hebe his bride on snowy Olympos,
Daughter of Zeus and gold-sandalled Hera.
Happy at last, his great work done, he lives
Agelessly and at ease among the immortals.
(Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. by Lombardo, pgs. 87-88, lines 957-962)

In the scene directly adjacent to the underworld image of *Odyssey* XI, another myth recalls the great warrior hero Herakles without explicitly displaying him. In it, a triple-headed man in soldier’s armor appears before a royal couple in a space delineated by an ominous mist. By the nature of his form and a partial label nearby, most Etruscan scholars identify the character as that of Geryon.\(^{114}\) Herakles figures so prominently in the mythology of Geryon that the mere presence of the three-headed primordial giant would call to mind the myth of Herakles’ tenth labor, the abduction of the cattle of Geryon from the land of Erytheia.\(^{115}\)

And Ocean’s daughter Kallirhoe mingled in love
Of Aphrodite golden with stout-hearted Chryasor
And bore him a son, of all mortals the strongest,
Geryones, whom the mighty Herakles killed
For his shambling cattle on wave-washed Erytheia.
(Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. by Lombardo, pgs. 88-89, lines 989-991)

Here in the tomb of Orcus II, the scene is that of Geryon standing at attention before a kingly deity labeled Aita and his snake-haired queen with an Etruscan name associated with that

\(^{114}\) Jannot, 67-68, 165 which gives a concise overview of the deification of Herakles upon his adoption into Etruscan culture from the Greek. Consequently, he is the only Greek name to be written on the Piacenza liver, an important divination tool that only lists Etruscan and Italic names otherwise; Steingräber, 209.

\(^{115}\) Apollodorus, 2.5.10, among several ancient sources including Hesiod, Aeschylus, Plato, Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Stesichorus, Pausanias, and Strabo.
of the goddess Persephone. A plausible interpretation of the scene would have Geryon
complaining about the loss of his property, a herd of immortal cattle, and the murder of their
warden to the king and queen of the underworld. This would mean that in the time scheme
represented in the tomb’s paintings, Herakles had already accomplished his deed and stolen the
cattle, while one of his next tasks would involve the kidnapping of Hades’ own guard dog,
Cerberus.116 Geryon may also be imparting a warning to the infernal rulers that Herakles is
coming to them soon.

The story of Herakles’ journey westward to the island dwelling of Geryon’s cattle also
recalls the westward edge of the Mediterranean’s waters with the journey to the frightening
underworld, making a successful return more meaningful in the context of funerary images. Just
as Odysseus traveled westward towards the river Ocean to arrive at the realm of Hades, so too
did Herakles travel towards the setting sun in a drinking cup to complete his tenth labor.117 The
implication of Herakles’ successful mission may have to do with an idea of death and rebirth, or
the descent to the underworld and a prodigious return. The route back from the west taken by
Herakles, herding the stolen cattle back to Greece, had by the fifth century BCE come to be
known as the Heraklean Way (Figure 35)—an avenue not just of transportation, but a
connection to the heroism and legitimacy of the hero, his divine favor, and the acculturation he
represented.118 Both Greeks and Etruscans sought to connect their civilizations’ power structures
to the status of Herakles just as they both drew links from the cities and rulers of the fourth and
third centuries BCE back to the Bronze Age heroic era.119

117 Odyssey XI,1-22
119 Jannot, 165; Malkin 1998, 156-257;Miles, 96-110
For centuries, various cities, civilizations, and ruling elites have tried to connect themselves with the mythology of Herakles. The ruling family of classical Sparta, various Greek tyrants of Magna Graecia, the Romans, and even the Phoenicians and Carthaginians used the imagery of Herakles to declare their divine right to wield power (Figure 27). One of the most famous later examples of the politics of the Heraklean myth involves the second century CE Roman emperor Commodus declaring himself the embodiment of the hero and commissioning the appropriate statuary of himself wearing the telltale lion skin and brandishing the Herakles’ club (Figure 28). More contemporary with the Tomb of Orcus, the Romans and Phoenicians battled for the legacy of Herakles in the decades before and during the first two Punic Wars. The Heraklean Way, the convergence of myth, politics, geography, and cultural identity, ran from the Pillars of Herakles, Strait of Gibraltar, across Spain, France, and down into Italy and Sicily, before returning to Illyria and terminating in Boeotia. A cannon of apocryphal stories sprang up along the route as cities and rulers added themselves into the divine wanderings of Greece’s most fearsome warrior hero. While the Romans added Herakles to their founding myth, connecting the ancient Forum Boarium of the city to the episode of a stolen cow from Geryon’s herd, the Phoenicians were melding their god Melqart with the identity of Herakles in a competition for cultural hegemony in the central Mediterranean. The Etruscans adopted the hero into their pantheon as well, often depicting Herakles feeding from the teat of the goddess Uni, associated with Hera, even showing him doing so as a grown man (Figure 26). By the

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120 Tom Holland, *Persian Fire: The First World Empire and the Battle for the West*. (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 68-98 for an explanation of the Heraclids’ leadership in Sparta; Miles, 96ff for the juxtaposition of the Phoenician deity Melqart with the persona of Herakles; Pomeroy, 434ff for Alexander’s connection to Herakles.

121 Boatwright, 405-406.

122 Knapp, 103-122.

123 Miles, 107-111.

124 Grummond, 78-84, Fig. V.14-17: De Grummond explains the use of this image, along with several examples of bronze mirrors that depict Hercle, the Etruscan Herakles, nursing from Uni/Hera. The visual imagery blends traditional Greek myth with Etruscan themes to indicate the apotheosis of Herakles.
time of the construction of Orcus II, a long and intricate history surrounding the ownership of the Herakles myth had developed among the cultural elites of the Mediterranean.

While Herakles represented a temporal power and right to political domination for some, in the Tomb of Orcus II he may serve another significant purpose. Herakles, as one of the few Greek heroes to descend to the underworld and return, may represent a triumph over death and the despair felt by the family of the deceased. The mythology of Herakles offers several examples of the hero overcoming death, either for himself or for others. In the commission of his tenth labor, Herakles journeys to the far west, an area associated with the land of the dead.\footnote{William Gwathmey Manly, “Ithaca or Leucas?” in \textit{The University of Missouri Studies, Vol II, Number 1}. (Edited by Frank Thilly. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1903), 1-52.} An analysis of this specific myth appears in greater detail later in this thesis when the scene of Geryon before Hades and Persephone comes into focus. In the myth of Prometheus, Herakles ends the suffering of the titan when he frees Prometheus from his chains and helps him leave the site of his eternal punishment.\footnote{Apollodorus 1.7.2; Hesiod, \textit{Theogony} 523-533; Pausanias 5.11.6; Strabo 11.5.5.} Prometheus had been sentenced by Zeus to have his liver eaten daily by an eagle in retaliation for passing fire to humankind.

\begin{quote}
And he bound Prometheus with ineluctable fetters,  
Painful bonds, and drove a shaft through his middle,  
And set a long-winged eagle on him that kept gnawing  
His undying liver, but whatever the long-winged bird  
Ate the whole day through, would all grow back by night.  
That bird the mighty son of pretty-ankled Alkmene,  
Herakles, killed, drove off the evil affliction  
From Iapetos’ son and freed him from his misery—  
Not without the will of Zeus, high lord of Olympos,  
So that the glory of Theban-born Herakles  
Might be greater than before on the plentiful earth.  
\end{quote}

(Hesiod, \textit{Theogony}, trans. by Lombardo, pgs. 75-76, lines 523-533)
In the story of Theseus and Pirithous, Herakles arrives in most retellings to rescue either one or both of the heroes from their seats in the underworld. Hades punished the heroes after they dared to attempt an abduction of Persephone, the infernal god having fused them onto stone benches that caused forgetfulness. Upon his descent into the underworld, Herakles thwarts the divine punishment doled out by Hades, just as he had circumvented Zeus’ will that Prometheus should suffer indefinitely.

The greatest indicator of Herakles’ rightful place in the context of Orcus II involves the hero’s last labor. Before he is able to ascend to Olympos and experience his eternal reward amongst the gods and receive his divine wife, Herakles accomplishes the most cosmically consequential of his tasks—the kidnapping of the hellhound Cerberus. More than just a monstrous pet or companion to Hades, Cerberus carries out an essential function in the divine order of existence. He guards the threshold of the underworld and prevents the souls of the deceased from leaving. Cerberus does not kill the living, nor does he act as either Thanatos, the bringer of death, or Hermes psychopompus, the guider of souls to the undergloom.

In front of that stand the echoing halls
Of mighty Hades and dread Persephone,
Underworld gods, and a frightful, pitiless
Hound stands guard, and he has a mean trick:
When someone comes in he fawns upon him
Wagging his tail and dropping his ears,
But he will not allow anyone to leave—
He runs down and eats anyone he catches
Leaving Persephone’s and Hades’ gates.

(Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. by Lombardo, pg. 82, lines 772-780)

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127 Apollodorus Epit 2.11.20-24; Euripides, *Heracles* 1170-1173.
128 Apollodorus 2.5.12; Hesiod, *Theogony* 772-780.
The text includes an important distinction—Cerberus stops those that have already arrived in Hades from escaping. The divine order rests upon the division of the three realms—the land of the living, the ethereal realm of the immortals, and the dark world of the dead. In the absence of Cerberus, the shades of the dead would theoretically be able to leave the underworld and could haunt the living earth, or more alarmingly, ascend to the celestial heights of the gods. Though a frightening prospect for the divine order, the underlying message for the occupants of the Tomb of Orcus II involves the possibility of someday, through a cultural or spiritual heroism, leaving the prison of death for another existence. In more a more geopolitical reading of the myth, the absence of the hellhound would allow for the resurgence not just of human souls, but of the Etruscan, or at least the Tarquinian, civilization. This theme of rebirth, resurgence, and anticipation appears in other details and through other references to the mythological cannon of the Greeks and Etruscans within Orcus II.
Chapter 6: Geryon Stands before the Infernal Couple

As a tenth labor, he was ordered to fetch the cattle of Geryon from Erytheia. Erytheia was an island that lay near the Ocean and is now called Gadeira; it was inhabited by Geryon, son of Chryasor and Callirrhoe, daughter of Oceanos. He had the body of three men joined into one; these were united at the waist, but divided into three again from the hips and thighs downwards.  
(Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. by Hard, Bk. 2, Ch. 5.10)

On the wall adjacent to the nekyia landscape, and directly across from the entrance of the Tomb of Orcus II, Geryon, in the form of a three-headed warrior, stands before Hades and Persephone as if in conversation or awaiting a response (Figure 29). Geryon, like Theseus and Pirithous, could be linked through myth to the hero Heracles. As his tenth labor, Heracles stole the cattle of the three-headed giant and herded them from the lands of the west back into his home in Boeotia. Geryon himself was killed in the process and in this context may be reporting to Hades the events that had transpired, including the possible involvement of Hades’ own cattle. Those animals were tended to on the same island. After killing Geryon, Heracles accepted the golden cup of Helios, the cup that allowed the sun to return back across the ocean each night in anticipation of the next day’s sunrise (Figure 25). The rising and setting of the sun, and by extension, the possession of this golden cup, have further implications for the themes of death and rebirth. Like the cosmic affront to Helios committed by Odysseus’ men when they ate his

130 Apollodorus, II.5.10 and endnote; Stesichorus, *Geryoneis* lines 1-5.
cattle on the island of Thrinacria, the stealing of Geryon’s special cattle has wider implications. Here in Orcus II, the giant stands before Hades and Persephone either as a member of the divine order, or upon his death at the hands of Herakles.

And Chryasor begot Geryon, with a triple head,  
After mingling with Kallirhoe, Ocean’s daughter.  
Mighty Heracles stripped him of life and limb  
By his shambling cattle on sea-circled Erythea  
The day he drove those broadfaced cattle away  
To holy Tiryns, crossing the ford of Ocean  
And killing Orthos and the herdsman Eurytion  
In that hazy stead beyond glorious Ocean.  
(Hesiod, Theogony, trans. by Lombardo, pg. 69, lines 288-295)

While not directly related, even the blinding of the Cyclops recalls the abduction of Geryon’s cattle in certain elements of the story. In The Odyssey in Athens: Myths of Cultural Origins, Erwin Cook expounds a detailed comparison between the stealing of the cattle of Geryon by Herakles, Odysseus’ escape from the Cyclops in Book IX of the Odyssey, and the killing of the sacred cattle of Helios in Book XI. Both herds of animals have connections to the functioning of the sun, the balance between night and day, life and death. In his explanation, Cook accounts for the geography of both myths as another feature of the cosmic balance in that Thrinacria represents the east while Erytheia represents the west. The rising and setting of the sun would have had clear implications for the relationship between birth and death, and possibly

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131 Homer, Odyssey Bk. 12, line 347ff.  
132 Erwin F. Cook, The Odyssey in Athens: Myths of Cultural Origins. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995 (Chapter 2: “The World of Poseidon”) 49-92. Cook’s analysis is intriguing for its connections among the very myths depicted on the walls of the Tomb of Orcus, although he does not make reference to the tomb. While Cook’s focus is on Athens’ relationship to the Homeric Odyssey, the relationship between Athens and Tarquinia, and with the Spurinna family in particular, makes Athenian cultural sensibilities more relevant than just coincidence.
a cycle of rebirth. Given the totality of the Tomb of Orcus II’s paintings, the selection of Geryon as the sole conversant with Hades and Persephone fits into a larger theme of death and rebirth, of the cosmic cycle of the sunrise and sunset, and to unite with the other scenes in their connection to the hero Herakles.

Though the mural is damaged to the same degree as the other walls in the tomb, the images and labels of Geryon, Hades, and Persephone are clear. Just as they are labeled in their Etruscan names, so too do the characteristics of the three belie Etruscan influences rather than a wholesale copy of Greek artistic imagery. To be sure, the scene, like the rest of Orcus II, represents a clear Hellenistic influence in both context and style, but distinctly Etruscan motifs may be discerned that round out the message of this Tarquinian burial space.

Hades, or ‘Aita’ as he is presented in the Tomb of Orcus, is shown seated on what appears to be a throne with his wife Persephone beside him. He brandishes a snake in one hand and holds forward the other arm in a gesture aimed at Geryon, who stands before him. Hades’ skin is red in keeping with the convention for males, while Persephone is colored the customary yellowish white for females. He is bare to the waist and traces of a robe falling to his feet are visible, of which only a few toes are intact. One of the most notable aspects of Hades is that he is wearing the head of a wolf (Figure 30), with open mouth and shaggy gray fur, on top of his head in the place of a crown or diadem. In Greek mythology and imagery, Herakles is known by his wearing of the Nemean lion’s head and skin as a hooded cape, but the use of the wolf on Hades’ person is not common. Instead, this iconography has deep roots in Etruscan imagery and myth.133

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Archaeological evidence has revealed images of wolves, and of a man wearing a wolf skin, have associations with death, violence, and the underworld. According to Jannot, both the inscription ‘Aita,’ and the depiction of an Etruscan Hades are novel to the Tomb of Orcus II.\(^\text{134}\) Evidence suggests that the Etruscans revered a more ancient chthonic death deity named Calu before his function was merged with the Greek Hades in the late fourth century BCE.\(^\text{135}\) Votives and other figures dedicated or depicting Calu occur over many centuries of Etruscan history, including votive statuette of a dog or wolf inscribed to Calu from the early third century BCE and found near Florence.\(^\text{136}\) Of course, the most famous example of wolf imagery in Etruscan art is the Capitoline Wolf, a bronze statue to which later Renaissance artists added the figures of Romulus and Remus suckling at her teat.\(^\text{137}\) In Orcus II, the image of Aita is the product of several centuries of fusion between Etruscan indigenous beliefs and the Greek mythology of Hades. By the time of the late fourth century BCE, the outward appearance and nature of the figures have more in common with their Hellenistic counterparts than they do with older Etruscan antecedents. Other images of Aita and Persephone appear around the same time, one in the Golini Tomb as participants in the banquet scene painted on the wall, and the other on a sarcophagus from Torre San Severo, found near Orvieto and dating from the mid fourth century BCE.\(^\text{138}\) On the sarcophagus, Aita and Persephone watch as Trojan princes are sacrificed for Patroclus, a scene almost identical to the one in the François Tomb. The difference between the

\(^{134}\) Jannot, 153-154.  
^{135}\) Ibid.  
^{136}\) De Grummond, 55-56 and 56, Figure IV.4.  
^{137}\) Although lately the fifth century BCE dating of the Capitoline Wolf has been thrown into questions, with recent analysis putting it closer to the 11th century CE. “Lupa Capitolina,” Musei Capitolini. Rome: Soprintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali. http://www.museicapitolini.org. Accessed 14 July 2015. Regardless of the antiquity of that particular statue, both Livy and Cicero make reference to a similar such statue in ancient Rome, perhaps reflecting an adaptation of the Etruscan wolf imagery into a Roman context. Livy X.23; Cicero, De Divinatione 1.20 and 2.47.  
^{138}\) For the Golini Tomb, see Dennis (Vol. 2), 52ff; For the Sarcophagus of Torre San Severo, see Edoardo Galli. “Il Sarcofago etrusco di Torre San Severo, con quattro scene del Ciclo Troiano,” in Monumenti Antichi (Vol. XXIV) Milan: Librario della Real Casa e della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, 1916.
François scene and the one on the Torre San Severo sarcophagus is that in the former, the connection with death and the underworld is made by the presence of Vanth and Charun, whereas on the sarcophagus Aita and Persephone fulfill that function.\textsuperscript{139} The interplay between Etruscan and Hellenistic death imagery is evident in the Tomb of Orcus II itself, as one wall shows Aita and Persephone, while the Etruscan demon Tuchulcha stands guard over Theseus on the other side of the room.

While the seated figure of Aita reinforces the general funerary nature of the burial space, the attendance of Geryon and the relationship between the two figures offer a more nuanced reading. Geryon and Hades intersect in two significant ways. First, both are the owners of infernal hellhounds. Hades keeps Cerberus as the guardian of the underworld, and his role is to retrieve shades of the dead that may try to escape. He is deft at hiding his ferocity in the form of fawning affection as described in the previous section,\textsuperscript{140} but he is essential in maintaining the proper separation of the living and the death by keeping the lifeless shades in their underworld dwelling. Geryon is the master of Orthos, the dog that guards his special herd of cattle (Figure 24). Orthos was a brother to Cerberus, as they both were born to Echidna and Typhaon, and according to Hesiod he fathered the Nemean lion as well. All three creatures are tied together by the mythology of Herakles—the hero kills the Nemean lion and famously wears its skin for his first labor, then kills Orthos in the commission of his tenth labor, and finally kidnaps Cerberus from Hades as his twelfth.\textsuperscript{141} Second, both Hades and Geryon keep their cattle on the same island in the west, Erytheia, under the care of different herdsmen. When Herakles arrived to take the cattle, he first killed Orthos and then Euytion, Geryon’s herdsman (Figure 23). Menoites, the herdsman of Hades, was the first to inform Geryon of what had happened. After confronting

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{139} Galli, 35-50.\textsuperscript{140} Hesiod, \textit{Theogony}, lines 774-780.\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, lines 288-295 and 307-333; Apollodorus, II.5.1, 10, and 12.}
Herakles, Geryon was killed by an arrow.\textsuperscript{142} The scene on the wall makes sense in that both Geryon and Hades would have much to discuss with one another.

Though Geryon has already been killed by the time he meets Hades, his cattle and his killer were still on the move. After leaving Erytheia, Herakles passes through Tyrrhenia as part of is route home—thus connecting the story even more deeply to the history of the Etruscans, as Tyrrhenia is the designation that Herodotus and Thucydides use to identify Etruria.\textsuperscript{143} Once back in Greece, Herakles was immediately sent out on his next task, to head back west and retrieve the golden apples of the Hesperides. In doing so, Herakles makes use of the same cup given to him by the sun as a travel mechanism, and he has an encounter with Atlas.\textsuperscript{144} The western geography has implications not just for Etruria in relation to Greece, but a more cosmic function of night and day, life and death. Just as Odysseus sails across the river Ocean to arrive at Hades, so are the island of Erytheia and that of the Hesperides out past the pillars of Herakles and in a region beyond human understanding. One small nod to the role of Atlas, both the Titan and his place at the end of the earth, may be seen in the two large jars bookending the shelf of golden vessels just across the room of Orcus II. Both jars incorporate the figure of a man holding the weight of the container on his shoulder, just as Atlas shouldered the weight of the sky.

“The daughter of Atlas, whose dread mind knows
All the depths of the sea and who supports
The tall pillars that keep earth and heaven apart.”
(Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 1, pg. 3, lines 58-60)

\textsuperscript{142} Apollodorus, II.5.10. Diodorus Siculus, IV.17.1ff explains that Herakles first gathered an army to fight not only Geryon, but also Chrysaor, his two other sons, and a series of barbarian armies from southern Spain. Here there are echoes of Herakles’ civilizing mission—clearing land of barbarians in favor of civilized Greeks.

\textsuperscript{143} Herodotus, 1.94; Thucydides, 7.53.1-2.

\textsuperscript{144} Apollodorus, II.5.11.
Atlas, crimped hard, holds up the wide sky
At earth’s limits, in front of the shrill-voiced Hesperides,
Standing with indefatigable head and hands,
For this is the part wise Zeus assigned him.

(Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. by Lombardo, lines 519-522)

Looking beyond the shelf of vessels to the right, the space of Orcus II continues its narrative, a narrative that is not unlike Apollodorus’ account of Herakles’ time in Hades. Upon reaching the underworld for his twelfth labor, Herakles’ actions included a meeting with Medusa, though Hermes assures the hero that she is impotent, merely a shade of her former self. This interaction echoes the nature of Herakles himself when Odysseus speaks to him in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*.\(^{145}\) The hero has a dual nature that allows him to be both a shade in the underworld and simultaneously attending the congregation of deities on Olympus. Though Medusa is mortal, she has a quality that scares Herakles\(^{146}\) at first and that terrifies Odysseus, with the latter fleeing the underworld at the mere possibility that Persephone might choose to send the Gorgon’s severed head: “…and I turned pale with fear / That Persephone would send from Hades’ depths / The pale head of that monster, the Gorgon.”\(^{147}\) While the Gorgon is not depicted on the walls in Orcus II, Persephone, standing alongside her husband’s throne, does have snakes interwoven through her hair. The image of Persephone in the contemporary Golini Tomb does not have snakes in her hair and in that tomb she is seated beside Hades as a member of the ongoing banquet. Like the Tomb of Orcus II, the Golini Tomb version of Hades is labeled as Aita and he wears a wolf skin cap. Also in the Golini Tomb, nearby the royal couple stands a label laden with all sizes and shapes of golden vessels to fuel the infernal banquet. In Orcus II, Persephone wears a hooded robe, floor-length and with a colored border at the neckline. She

\(^{145}\) Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, pg. 176, lines 630-661.

\(^{146}\) Apollodorus, II.5.12.

\(^{147}\) Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, pg. 177, lines 668-670.
wears a double string of beads around her neck and, apart from the snakes in her hair, appears much like a noble Etruscan woman might.\textsuperscript{148}

The role of Persephone is more than as an adjunct to her husband, or a formulaic partner in a couple whose presence denotes the underworld, she is an active and powerful character and the ultimate example of the dual nature exhibited by Herakles—she transcends both the land of the living and the land of the dead. While the story of Persephone’s abduction explains how she became the queen of the dead, the settlement that the gods made afterwards figures strongly into the Tomb of Orcus II. Persephone holds in her story the promise of renewed life. Every autumn she descends into the realm of the undergloom, but every spring she cycles back into the land of the living.\textsuperscript{149} She wields great power when seated in her infernal throne, as she is often referred to as ‘dread Persephone’ in the Homeric tradition. She is the one who allows Orpheus to return with Eurydice, although her story too ends with the finality and inevitability of death.\textsuperscript{150} Even Herakles is subject to the cosmic order in that once he has kidnapped Cerberus, he satisfies Eurystheus, his taskmaster, that he has completed his twelfth labor, he still needs to return the hound back to Hades.\textsuperscript{151} In the Tomb of Orcus II, the narrative continues with an Etruscan twist on the intersection between Herakles’ last labor and the ill-fated escapade of the hero Theseus and his friend Pirithous. Within the burial space of Orcus II, the figures of Hades and Persephone are within sight of both Theseus and Pirithous, sitting on the rocks passing their time by playing a board game. Apollodorus summarizes the interaction when Herakles approaches them:

\textsuperscript{148} De Grummond, 229-230 and 230-231 Figures X.26-27; Steingraber, 212.
\textsuperscript{149} Apollodorus, I.5.1. The story of Persephone is more of an amalgam of details from different sources and traditions. Homer does not mention her abduction in the Iliad or Odyssey, although Hesiod (Theogony, lines 916-919) does. Neither mention the bargain struck by the gods to have her descend and return—one of the main sources for the abduction story comes from the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. By the time of the construction of the Tomb of Orcus II in the late fourth century BCE, the Hellenistic version recorded in Apollodorus was widespread, although not universally observed.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, I.3.2; Plato, Symposium, 179D; Ovid, Metamorphoses 10; Virgil, Georgics 4.453.
\textsuperscript{151} Apollodorus, II.5.12.
As he drew close to the gates of Hades, he discovered Theseus there, and Pirithous, who had tried to gain Persephone as his bride, and had been imprisoned there for that reason. When they saw Herakles, they stretched their arms towards him, hoping that his strength would enable them to be raised from the dead.

(Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. by Hard, Bk. 2, Ch. 5.12)
Chapter 7: An Etruscan Demon Guards Two Greek Heroes

“When Theseus arrived in Hades with Peirithoos, he became the victim of a trick. For on the pretence that they were about to enjoy his hospitality as guests, Hades asked them to sit down first on the Chair of Forgetfulness; and they became stuck to it, and were held down by coils of snakes. Peirithoos remained a prisoner in Hades ever after, but Heracles brought Theseus back to earth and sent him to Athens.”

(Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. by Hard, Epit., Ch. 1.24)

The juxtaposition of the blinding of the Cyclops with the characters Theseus and Pirithous who bide their time in Hades by playing a form of board game, suggests a theme of escape from incarceration. Whether the murals illustrate that the idea that escape is possible or impossible is ambiguous. The scene of Odysseus blinding the Cyclops demonstrates the precise moment at which the hero’s actions translate into the opportunity to escape certain death. This element of the story is reinforced by a simple doorway drawn in the background of the scene, just between the figures of Odysseus and the Cyclops. The space between them represents the confluence of decisiveness and action; precisely within this space the exit appears. Similarly the figures of Theseus and Pirithous, clearly labeled with their Etruscan names, sit together under the watchful gaze of the horrific demon Tuchulcha. While the instrument of their escape is not visible in the existing paintings, a viewer with knowledge of the myth would anticipate the arrival of Herakles to free either one or both heroes from their infernal seats.

The image of Tuchulcha in the Tomb of Orcus is the only one known to exist by name in this medium, but his presence adds a strong Etruscan indigenous element to a known Greek myth.
While the retelling of the myth varies, the image of the two heroes recalls the story of Theseus’ and Pirithous’ journey to the underworld in a daring attempt to kidnap Persephone to make her consort to Pirithous, just as Theseus had done with Helen. Once in the realm of Hades, the god prevented the taking of his wife and punished the two heroes by adhering them to the rocks upon which they sat.

The seriousness with which Hades punishes the two heroes confirms that the attempted kidnap of Persephone has consequences beyond just the stealing of the god’s wife. The two had already kidnapped Helen, a daughter of Zeus, an act that connects Theseus to the imagery of an egg as a symbol for rebirth in Etruscan art, as Helen and her sister Clytemnestra were said to have hatched from eggs after Zeus mated with Leda in the form of a swan. While Persephone herself may be a symbol of rebirth and the cyclical nature of life and death, any attempt to kidnap her would have cosmic ramifications along the lines of the taking of Cerberus by Hades or Odysseus’ men eating the cattle of Helios. As Persephone is the queen of the underworld and consort of Hades, any change in that divine order would result in an imbalance between the land of the dead and that of the living. After completing his twelfth labor, Herakles returned Cerberus to his rightful place, just as Zeus acceded to Helios’ demand that Odysseus and his men be punished for having killed his sacred cattle. The two stories intersect in the detail that at the precise moment when Odysseus desires to meet the two, Theseus and Pirithous, while in the underworld, that is the moment when a sudden fear seizes him, that Persephone would send the severed head of the Gorgon up to meet him. That Persephone is the active element of this threat

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153 *Apollodorus, Epit.* 1.24; *Pausanias*, 10.29.2.
154 *Apollodorus*, 3.10.5ff; De Grummond, 128.
confirms that she is a powerful force in Hades,\textsuperscript{156} one that determines who must stay and who may leave. The fear that strikes Odysseus occurs just after he had been conversing with the shade of Herakles, the kidnapper of Cerberus:

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“And Heracles went back into the house of Hades. 
But I stayed where I was, in case any more
Of the heroes of yesteryear might yet come forth.
And I would have seen some of them—
Heroes I longed to meet, Theseus and Peirithous,
Glorious sons of the gods—but before I could,
The nations of the dead came thronging up
With an eerie cry, and I turned pale with fear
That Persephone would send from Hades’ depths
The pale head of that monster, the Gorgon.”
(Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 11, pg. 176-177, lines 661--670)
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The cosmic nature of this incident is the primal scream that Odysseus hears coming from the shades of the dead—they seem to react to a growing imbalance or uncertainty caused by the presence of the living hero in the land of the dead. A similar imbalance shakes Hades when Herakles attempts to free Pirithous, the architect of the plot to take Persephone from her rightful place at Hades’ side.

When on his mission to bring the infernal dog Cerberus to the world above, Herakles meets Theseus and Pirithous. He attempts to free them from their bondage and according to Apollodorus he frees only Theseus. Herakles lets go after the earth shook at his attempt to free Pirithous. More specifically, the narrative of Apollodorus does not say that Herakles was trying to pry the two heroes merely from a rock seat. Instead, the text reads, “they stretched their arms

\textsuperscript{156} Persephone is also the active agent in Tiresias being able to retain his power of prophesy in the underworld according to the \textit{Odyssey}: “The blind prophet, whose mind is still strong. / To him alone Persephone has granted / Intelligence even after his death.” (Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 10, pg. 155, lines 515-517).
towards him, hoping his strength would enable them to be *raised from the dead.*"¹⁵⁷ This detail of
the myth has implications for the likelihood of escaping death. If Heracles is able to free
Theseus, then the occupier of the tomb surely has hope that he too may be freed. More likely,
though, an outcome like that of Pirithous is darker and more permanent. He must spend eternity
seated on that rock because the attempt to change his fate results in a cosmic quaking, a signal
that were he to leave Hades, the proper order of things would be damaged irreparably. The
hulking mass of the demon Tuchulcha only reinforces the message that the forces of death are
constant and unwavering, just as they are menacing and ugly.

Looking at the painted wall of Orcus II, after the doorway and across the room from both
Geryon and the Cyclops, a complicated vision appears to unite both Greek and indigenous
Etruscan mythology. In it, the heroes Theseus and Pirithous play some type of board game while
either being threatened or guarded by the underworld demon Tuchulcha. Both heroes wear
expressions akin more to boredom or melancholy than fear or anguish, although the image of
Pirithous is badly damaged and difficult to see (*Figure 32*). By the late fourth century BCE, the
myth of Theseus’ visit to Hades, and his rescue by Herakles upon the latter’s effort to retrieve the
hellhound Cerberus, had already been appearing in art and literature throughout Greece and
southern Italy. Several examples of Apulian, Lucanian, and Attic vases depict Theseus and
Herakles in the underworld.¹⁵⁸ In Euripides’ 416 BCE play *Herakles*, the rescue serves both men,
as Theseus is spared eternal punishment while Herakles gains a powerful ally, one that rescues
him when the strongman kills his wife and children in a fit of madness.¹⁵⁹ The underworld rescue
scene, just as the depiction of Geryon with Hades and Persephone, does not appear in the

¹⁵⁷ Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans by Hard, pg. 84, Ch. II.5.12 (emphasis added).
1918, 136 and 137 Figure 85.
Homeric *Odyssey*, so its inclusion in the same tomb space as those that do come from Homer must speak to an intentional juxtaposition on behalf of the tomb’s designers. What the three underworld scenes have in common are their connections to the mythology of Herakles along with deeper implications for the themes of death, rebirth, and the cosmic balance between the two.

The two myths, Odysseus’ journey and the descent of Theseus and Pirithous, were so closely associated that the famous paintings of Polygnotus of Athens had the *nekyia* of Odysseus next to the infernal seats of the two friends. While most secondary sources state that the scene in Orcus II has Theseus and Pirithous passing time playing a game of chance on a board, the painting is so badly damaged that to say with certainty that this is the case is impossible. The scene may also represent a downward-looking Theseus that, as Pausanias describes it, sitting and looking upon his sword and contemplating its helplessness against the awesome and inevitable power of death.

Beyond Eriphyle have been painted Elpenor and Odysseus. The latter is squatting on his feet, and holding his sword over the trench, towards which the seer Teiresias is advancing. After Teiresias is Anticleia, the mother of Odysseus, upon a rock. Elpenor has on instead of clothes a mat, such as is usual for sailors to wear.

Lower down than Odysseus are Theseus and Peirithous sitting upon chairs. The former is holding in his hands the sword of Peirithous and his own. Peirithous is looking at the swords, and you might conjecture that he is angry with them for having been useless and of no help in their daring adventures. Panyassis the poet says that Theseus and Peirithous did not sit chained to their chairs, but that the rock grew to their flesh and so served as chains.

(Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. by Jones, Bk. 10, Ch. 29.8-9)
While Theseus and Pirithous represent Hellenistic myths that were gaining favor as Hellenistic Greeks spread Orphic and Pythagorean ideas from the eastern Mediterranean into Italy, older Etruscan traditional beliefs are represented on the walls of Orcus II. The demon Tuchulcha is an imposing figure related to Charun, Vanths, and the imagery of death. While Charun stands by the door in his role as the mallet-bearing death deity that is able to bring shades of the departed down to the underworld, Tuchulcha has a different role. He is a chthonic divinity whose imagery connects death and the natural world. The gender of Tuchulcha is unclear, though its features reflect the beak of a vulture, the ears of a donkey, and the color pattern of a poisonous snake. While the vulture’s connection to death and decay is a natural one, and the symbolism of a donkey’s ears is unclear, the imagery of the snake is the most prominent. Tuchulcha’s wings have the same green and black markings as those reflected on the back of the snake that he brandishes over the head of Theseus (Figures 32-33). Like Persephone on the opposite wall, Tuchulcha has two snakes protruding from his head. The connection between death and snakes has a long history across many cultures, including in Egypt, Persia, the Near East, Greece, and Italy. Both their slithering motion and the danger that venomous snakes

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161 De Grummond, 217-218.

162 For a compelling look at why so many of the snakes depicted in Hellenistic art have beards, see Maurizio Harari, “Perché all’inferno cresce la barba ai draghi?” in Gioacchino Francesco La Torre and Mario Torelli. Pittura ellenistica in Italia e in Sicilia: Linguaggi e tradizioni: Atti del Convegno di studi (Messina, 24-25 Settembre 2009). Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 2011. The author posits that the beards serve two roles: the first is to give the serpents a masculine, anthropomorphic aspect reminiscent of the great kings and deities of Greek myth, and the other is to artistically represent where the head ended and where the body began.

posed to ancient people produced a strong association with death, evil, and danger. In the case of Tuchulcha, the coloration on the snake he holds and on the demon’s wings represents that of the European adder (*Viperus berus*), a venomous snake common to northern and central Italy. Tuchulcha’s appearance is designed to be at once powerful and horrifying—like the death that he stands to represent.

Once the Etruscan culture was incorporated into the Roman civilization, aspects of Greek and Etruscan myth were adopted into both artistic and literary sensibilities. The most discernible aspect of Etruscan beliefs incorporated into Roman ones was the practice of augury and the continuation of the class of haruspices, whose prognostications continued to carry weight at least into the time of Augustus. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil has the character Charon express the seriousness with which he regards the cosmic order of balance between life and death, and particularly with the idea that the dead stay in Hades, and that visits there by living heroes upset that balance. Charon shouts ahead to Aeneas as he approaches the infernal River Styx in hope of entering Hades and speaking with his father. After hearing his admonition, the Cumaean Sibyl calms Charon down with an explanation of Aeneas’ task, and she assures Charon about what Aeneas does not want to do.

“Hold it right there, whoever you are

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164 According to Livy, Etruscan forces in a battle against Rome used snakes to an effective end, brandishing them to scare the Roman troops into retreat: “The other consul, who was operating against the Faliscans and Tarquinians, met with a defeat in the first battle. What mainly contributed to it and produced a real terror amongst the Romans was the extraordinary spectacle presented by their priests who, brandishing lighted torches and with what looked like snakes entwined in their hair, came on like so many Furies. At this sight the Romans were like men distraught or thunderstruck and rushed in a panic-stricken mass into their entrenchments.” Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, trans. by Foster, Bk. 7. Ch. 17.3.
Coming to our river in arms! Why are you here?
This is the Land of Shadows, of Sleep
And drowsy Night. Living bodies
May not be transported in this Stygian keel.
I was not happy to take Hercules
Across the lake, or Theseus and Pirithous,
Invincible sons of the gods though they were.
One of them wanted to drag off in chains
The Tartarean watchdog from Pluto’s throne—
And dragged him off trembling. The others tried
To carry off the queen from the bedroom of Dis.”

Apollo’s prophetess responded briefly:

“There is no such treachery here. Calm down.
Our weapons offer no threat of violence.
The giant watchdog may howl from his cave
Eternally and frighten the bloodless shades.
Proserpina may keep her chastity intact
Within her uncle’s doors…”

(Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 6, pgs. 143-144, lines 469-487)

The speeches make reference to Herakles’ journey to kidnap Cerberus, Theseus’ and Pirithous’ attempt to rape Persephone, and how Odysseus had ventured down into Hades as a living body among the shades of the dead. All of these episodes are depicted on the walls of the Tomb of Orcus II. The greater implications of these scenes include themes of life and death, escapism, cultural conflict, connections with the heroic past, and most consequentially the suggestion of an Orphic or Pythagorean philosophical approach to a cycle of death and rebirth. All of these attitudes occur in a Hellenistic world of images whose overall air is one of gloominess and solemnity.
Chapter 8: Reading the Room: Commonalities among Scenes in Orcus II

Atlas, crimped hard, holds up the wide sky
At earth’s limits, in front of the shrill-voiced Hesperides,
Standing with indefatigable head and hands,
For this is the part wise Zeus assigned him.
(Hesiod, Theogony, trans. by Lombardo, pg. 75, lines 519-522)

The Tomb of Orcus represents a microcosm of Etruscan history and culture from the third and fourth centuries BCE. The integration of Greek mythology, religion, and imagery has been so thorough, that the artists working on the Tomb created scenes with Greek heroes and prophets standing alongside Etruscan demons and divine amalgams of both cultures’ underworld rulers. The tomb’s architecture reveals two major areas of burial from different generations, although from the time of the fourth century BCE. The first section, Tomb of Orcus I, includes paintings mostly in line with previous Etruscan chamber tombs. Scenes of the deceased reclining on couches and being served in a banquet setting are common among Classical Age Etruscan tombs. The wall paintings of Velia Velcha and her family members are set off by the typical familial and titular inscriptions, and by something more ominous—a dark, cloudy gloom. The gloom may be both philosophical and metaphorical—at the same time Hellenistic ideas about the underworld and visual representations were more infiltrating into coastal Etruria. Etruscan civilization was increasingly recognizing an existential threat to its sense of self, Rome.

The second burial chamber of the Tomb of Orcus, Orcus II, has a separate entrance and was clearly a separate burial space when it was first constructed. Soon after, the two spaces were
unified and the tomb became two rooms of the same tomb. In Orcus II, the imagery and philosophy changes from that of Orcus I. In Orcus II, the focus is on a Homeric imagery of the afterlife based on the nekyia of Odysseus along with other scenes and characters from the Theban Cycle. Etruscan chthonic deities representing the horror and finality of death interrupt the Hellenistic setting to remind the viewer that they are in Tarquinia, not Greece. Tuchulcha and Charun are illustrative of an older tradition of Etruscan folklore and of a culture creating a mosaic image of the underworld using elements of Greek, Etruscan, Italic, and Near Eastern culture. While the wall paintings of both Orcus I and Orcus II are heavily damaged, a significant amount of visual literature still appears. In its original state, the imagery of the tomb would have been full of vibrant colors and the atmosphere of the place by torchlight would have been truly infernal.

While identifying the characters and scenes on each wall is important in interpreting the tomb, the message of the place comes from the entirety of the chamber’s artwork. Rather than read each mural as an independent scene, the best interpretation comes to the viewer who is able to read the room, not each separate wall. Each myth had been carefully selected and depicted by the artists under the direction of the tomb’s owners with very specific reasoning. The next two sections of this thesis examine what the Tomb of Orcus offers in terms of its recognition of death, how it makes sense of death visually through myth, and how the culture’s conception of life and death may have changed over time. Chapter 3 examines the broader social, cultural, and spiritual themes of the tomb of Orcus by looking at the entirety of the tomb’s artwork, the prevailing philosophical movements of the fourth century BCE and whether indications of specific beliefs about the afterlife are visible within the tomb’s burial space. Then, Chapter 4 looks at the political reality of the world of the Tarquinian elite in the late fourth century BCE.
with emphasis on the clash of Greek culture as expressed in Etruscan society and the growing
Roman powerhouse set to dominate the entire Italian peninsula within a few decades of the
tomb’s construction. The specific family who may have owned the tomb, the Spurinna or a
related offshoot, tied its fortunes with the city of Tarquinia and stood with Athens as the city
invaded Sicily. Later, the family maneuvered through a dynamic and rapidly shifting political
arena in the field of international diplomacy.

The late fourth century BCE was a time of tremendous change throughout the
Mediterranean world and beyond. The conquests of Alexander of Macedon, the rise of Rome,
and the prosperity of Carthage all impacted the Etruscans’ status among the powers of the region.
Etruscans’ sense of where they stood in comparison to other civilizations, and compared to
where they had historically stood in central Italian and Tyrrhenian power politics and influence
was in the process of being severely shaken. The Tomb of Orcus II is one of the last chamber
tombs built in the necropolis of Tarquinia, and as such it offers insight into a crucial time of the
subsumption of Etruscan culture. Contemplating an unsure future, Etruscans held more tightly
onto their heroic past by way of Greek mythology and visual images, along with their own
demonology.
Chapter 9: Cheating Death and Bouncing Souls: Broader Implications of Orcus II

Bringing together the seemingly disparate stories painted in the burial space of the Tomb of Orcus II, a clearer picture emerges of the broader themes and overall message the tomb conveys to the viewer. While the occupants lived and died when their city and region were in a state of flux, the ultimate power shift did not favor Tarquinia.\footnote{Haynes, 327-330; The main source for events concerning the Roman subsumption of the major cities of Etruria, including Tarquinia, is Livy’s \textit{Ab Urbe Condita}, Books 2-10. While the fourth century BCE began with the Roman annexation of Veii, the Etruscans were neither easily subdued nor identical in each city’s approach to dealing with the Romans.} Trying to make sense of the Roman ascension in the region, the Athenian decline occurring in the Eastern Mediterranean,\footnote{Pomeroy, et al., 369-409. Sources for fourth century Greece include Xenophon, Aristotle, and certain chapters of Plutarch.} the diminished power of both Greek and Phoenician trade,\footnote{Miles, 139-176. Miles relies on accounts from Arrian, Diodorus Siculus, Livy, and Plutarch.} and the subsumption of the Etruscan civilization by the Romans, the artists of Orcus II created a complex visual imagery to reflect their mixed emotional state. Along with the political and cultural realities, beliefs about death and the afterlife were also evolving. Older ideas about celebratory feasts and a Dionysiac atmosphere were giving way to a more nuanced, unsure, and solemn representation of the afterlife, one more aligned with Hellenistic concepts, including Orphism, that gained traction in the late fourth century BCE and beyond.\footnote{Bonfante, 261-263; De Grummond, 209-233; Jannot, 71; Stephan Steingräber, 245-279.} Though the Etruscans stopped building large painted tombs soon after the Tomb of Orcus was completed, their ideas and imagery of the afterlife persisted in parts of the Roman belief system.\footnote{Tim Cornell, \textit{The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c. 1000-264 BCE)}, London New York: Routledge, 1995, 151-172. Cornell does well to examine the Etruscan influence on Roman culture as a series of diffuse aspects of religion, ritual, and divination rather than as a wholesale adoption by the Romans of Etruscan culture.} The Tomb of Orcus provides evidence of certain
themes in its wall paintings and although the fragmentary nature of it does not give a full explanation, a deeper interpretation is possible.

While the mindset of the artists of the Tomb of Orcus II is impossible to know with certainty, clues exist about what messages and theme the tomb’s imagery was meant to convey. An illuminating reading of the tomb’s paintings comes from examining the commonalities and differences among the different scenes and comparing those with literary and textual sources. The themes that emerge surround a contemplation of the nature of death, of the boundary between life and death, and making sense of what happens after death both to the soul and to the body. Further, the tomb’s existence speaks not only for the deceased whose remains would have been placed in it, but also serves a purpose for the living. Living relatives or mourners may have entered the tomb, just as Odysseus had descended into the underworld, to gain information, remember the dead and their deeds, connect with the past, and contemplate the future with greater insight.\(^ {172}\) By looking to the three scenes of Odysseus blinding the Cyclops, Theseus with Tuchulcha, and the infernal landscape with Tiresias’ shade, the viewer may recognize that all three include concepts of escape and rescue. Superficially all three are based on heroic deeds, and as discussed in Chapter 2.2, the tomb’s owners would have wanted to connect themselves and their prestige with the heroic past.

Beyond the general exposition of heroism, the scenes together amplify the message of wanting to leave a place of mortal or even immortal danger. Odysseus and his men must get out of the Cyclops’ cave or they are certain to be killed and cannibalized.\(^ {173}\) Theseus and Pirithous are trapped in a suspended death, fused onto the Rock of Forgetfulness that threatens to doom

\[^{172}\text{Jannot, 69-70.}\]
\[^{173}\text{Homer, Odyssey IX.}\]
them and their memories for eternity.\textsuperscript{174} Tiresias stands ready for the arrival of Odysseus, and when they meet, the blind prophet imparts word designed to help Odysseus and his men escape certain death.\textsuperscript{175} Unfortunately for Odysseus’ men, they do not heed the warning and are all struck down by Zeus, an outcome that underscores the seriousness and the veracity of his instructions. The door in the background of the Cyclops mural, much like the door to the Tomb of Orcus II that is guarded by Charun, the gate-keeper, emphasizes that the means of escape is so close, and yet out of reach of anyone less than heroic.

The scene of Theseus and Pirithous alludes to their rescue by Herakles; their situation is so dire that they need outside intervention from the greatest and most physically active Greek hero. Herakles himself has straddled the line between death and immortality as the Homeric \textit{Odyssey} explains in Book XI.\textsuperscript{176} Herakles also represents the suspending of the proper balance of death and its permanence with his capture of Cerberus, and of his trip westward in Helios’ golden cup.\textsuperscript{177} In the latter episode, Herakles moves in the place of the sun on his return journey across the ocean in anticipation of the new day. The ability of the hero to play with the cosmic order and to use it to his advantage makes him an apt representation of the possibility that the power of death may be overcome.

The Tomb of Orcus II is more ambiguous, however, than merely celebrating the possibility of escape from death. Instead, the moment of escape is not shown in either case. Odysseus is just at the moment of blinding the Cyclops, but a tremendous amount of danger yet remains. The stone is still in front of the cave’s mouth, and the infuriated monster has yet to grasp for and crush more of Odysseus’ crew. Theseus and Pirithous are not shown with Herakles

\textsuperscript{174} Apollodorus, II.5.12;  
\textsuperscript{175} Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, XI.  
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, lines 630-661.  
\textsuperscript{177} Apollodorus, II.5.10; Stesichorus, \textit{Geryoneis}, Fr. 1, lines 1-7.
alongside them, nor as on the lekythos from the Berlin Museum (Figure 3),\textsuperscript{178} is Herakles attempting to pull Theseus up from the rock seat. Instead, Theseus and Pirithous are stuck, and are waiting. Theseus’ facial expression expresses not hope or passion, but resignation and ennui. De Grummond’s description of this scene holds that the two heroes are playing a board game, or perhaps a game of chance.\textsuperscript{179} Certainly the symbolism of a game of chance would speak to the unpredictable nature of the world and degree to which all humans are at the mercy of fate.\textsuperscript{180} Aside from the nature of the game they might be playing, the fact that they may be playing at all represents the overabundance of time they have, as games suggest leisure activity when all other necessary things have been done. Here, the use of game play to represent the passage of time also suggests the powerlessness of both Theseus and Pirithous to do anything other than wait. The scene conveys to the viewer not the certainty of rescue, but instead a gloomier message that while most versions of the myth have Theseus being rescued, here from the Tomb of Orcus II, he may not be, or at least he has not yet been rescued. The gleeful expression of Tuchulcha confirms that while something may happen in the future, he at that moment is confident in the eternity of their torment at his hands.

As previously discussed, while he is not visually represented in the tomb’s paintings, the figure of Herakles looms large. He is an active agent in the kidnapping of Cerberus, the guardian of the gates of the underworld, and Herakles was the rescuer of Theseus after the hero had suffered a kind of imprisonment in death.\textsuperscript{181} Herakles facilitates an escape from the permanence

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{179} De Grummond, 217-218.
\item \textsuperscript{180} For a comprehensive look at the role of chance in the lives of Greek heroes, with particular attention to the role of Ajax as the second best among the Achaeans, see Gregory Nagy, \textit{The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry}. Revised Edition. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, 26-41. Ajax is depicted on the underworld scene wall painting of Orcus II standing next to Tiresias.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Apollodorus, II.5.12.
\end{itemize}
of death by suspending the rules and through his heroic, superhuman action. While Theseus and Pirithous committed a grave sin by attempting to rape Persephone, Herakles successfully retrieves Cerberus and the viewer seeing both scenes juxtaposed may have wondered why one mission failed so miserably and the other was successful. In kidnapping Persephone, Theseus and Pirithous would have been going after the power of the dead itself. She is the queen of Hades and she represents the cosmic power death has over all humans. To remove her from her proper place would have meant a catastrophic cosmic rift along the lines of Helios’s threat to descend to the underworld and shine on the shades of the dead. Instead, Herakles takes Cerberus, the guardian of the gate of the underworld. His job is not to control life and death, but to keep the shades of the dead within the realm of Hades. Persephone personifies the relationship between life and death, while Cerberus is only an instrument to control the already dead. Additionally, Herakles returns Cerberus upon the completion of his task; he recognizes the importance of returning the cosmic balance by making sure Cerberus continues to guard the dead—a fact accentuated by Herakles’ killing of the guard dog Orthos. While Orthos was watching over the cattle of Geryon, he certainly did not have the cosmic responsibility of his brother and his killing was acceptable. None of the mythology surrounding Pirithous’ desire for Persephone indicates that he wanted to have control over her temporarily and would have later freed her to return to Hades. While the injustice of stealing another man’s rightful wife is a central premise behind the story of the Iliad, stealing a god’s wife exponentially increases the heinousness of the crime.

The mythology of the Tomb of Orcus II examines the nature of escape, rescue, and the nature of death. Logically, the next theme contemplated by the artists and owners of the tomb necessarily would have been the application of myth to reality—meaning that the viewer of the frescoes would want to think about what an escape from death or rescue from the underworld has

182 Homer, Odyssey XII, lines 393-394.
to do with us, the living. The questions turn to the mechanics of death and what may be gleaned about the relationship between life and death and whether that relationship is more than just one-sided. For Theseus and Pirithous, their death appears more like a suspended animation, stuck to a rock in Hades indefinitely, but surely a form of death. While mortal viewers and family members of the deceased could envision scenes of the great heroes, Odysseus and Herakles, rescuing themselves or other mythical characters, one scene holds out a more relevant mechanism of escape.

The shade of Tiresias, carefully labeled as such, and the tree with the tiny dynamic human figures presents a much more complex view of death. Both images point to an understanding of the human soul as both alive and distinct from the human body. First, Tiresias’ ability to predict the future, to see events yet to happen, makes him unique among the shades of the underworld. While all shades, Tiresias included, need to drink the blood of Odysseus’ sacrificial victims in order to gain enough strength to speak, only Tiresias is able to look ahead. All other shades that Odysseus encounters are coherent and interactive in their speeches, but all of their speeches are focused on the past. Many shades ask Odysseus about events that may have happened after each of their deaths, indicating that the shades of the dead are still interested in the world of the living. Achilles is only cheered from his deeply depressed mood by news of the heroism of his son Neoptolemus. Elpenor expresses his passionate request that he be properly buried both for his honor and for the sake of his soul’s present restlessness. Agamemnon represents a special case that will be discussed in more detail, but he too cannot help but ruminate on the past, unaware of both present and future. Though Tiresias is dead, he alone possesses the power of foresight. The Homeric *Odyssey* does not explain why Tiresias is allowed

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183 Homer, *Odyssey* XI, lines 90-95.
184 Ibid, lines 500-566.
to keep his faculties even in death, though other sources explain that since his insight was granted to him by the divine, it has a feature of immortality to it.\textsuperscript{185} In this way, the outline of concepts based on Orphic or Pythagorean philosophies may be seen to emerge.\textsuperscript{186}

The fourth century BCE was a time of changing ideas, as belief systems were influenced by classical philosophers, the new ideas imported to the Mediterranean by the Eastern conquests of Alexander, and the democratization of established beliefs that allowed for more universal participation.\textsuperscript{187} In the Tomb of Orcus, ideas about the afterlife expressed in the wall paintings do not point to a specific, institutionalized set of religious beliefs, but the themes of the images and choices its artists made reflect a general acknowledgement of certain concepts and beliefs. The literary allusions of the underworld scenes are an attempt to explain through known mythology the nature and substance of the afterlife. With dark clouds, Etruscan demons, and a landscape based on the Homeric world of the shades, the overall sentiment of the space is one of ominous eternity, though one image breaks the tone of the burial space with an indication of something different. The tree between Agamemnon and Tiresias on the left wall of Orcus II suggests the distinct separation of body from soul. The leaping and diving figures in the branches of the tree possess an airy lightness of being that is unique among all of the tomb’s other figures. The tree itself, possibly a reference to a reed along the shores of the river Acheron,\textsuperscript{188} appears similar to

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item Apollodorus, III.6.7; Callimachus, \textit{Hymn V}, trans. by Lombardo and Raynor, p. 35, lines 122-126.
\item For an examination of the intersection between Etruscan mystical beliefs and elements of Orphism, see Amalia Avramidou, “The Phersu Game Revisited,” in \textit{Etruscan Studies: Vol. 12}. pp. 73-88. Detroit: Wayne State University Press 2009. While Avramidou focuses primarily on sixth and fifth century BCE tombs in Etruria, the idea that the Etruscans were either influenced by or hired Greeks from Magna Graecia, is certainly relevant to the Tomb of Orcus. Orphic and Pythagorean elements that coincide with the mythology depicted in Orcus II include the importance of Cerberus, the roles of Herakles, of Persephone, and of Theseus and Pirithous in explaining the interaction between the heroes and the threshold of the underworld.
\item The \textit{libri acheruntici} were books detailing Etruscan beliefs about the afterlife and how to sustain the soul after death. The name comes from the infernal River Acheron, and, according to the fourth century CE Christian writer Arnobius, “… that which Etruria holds out in the Acherontic books, that souls become divine, and are freed from the law of death, if the blood of certain animals is offered to certain deities.” Arnobius of Sicca, \textit{Seven Books of}}
the others along the wall behind Agamemnon and Tiresias, as the presence of the black figures is what sets it apart. While the other scenes in the burial space include the detailed and labeled characters of myth, these black little figures are anonymous. The artists represents them as important for what they are, not who they are. The souls experience existence without the weight of their living bodies and so are able to move through space in a way not previously possible.\footnote{In Cratylus, 400 b-c, Plato discussed the interaction between body and soul, with the body being the receptacle of the soul, and the Orphic view that the soul is imprisoned in the physical body as if in it were a form of punishment. Plato, Cratylus, Parmenides, Greater Hippias, Lesser Hippias. Translated by H. N. Fowler. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939; In Gorgias, 493 a, Plato suggests that the body may actually be the tomb of the soul. Plato. Lysis, Symposium, Gorgias. Translated by W. R. M. Lamb. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925.}

The description of the suitors’ shades’ final descent from the Homeric \textit{Odyssey} returns to mind in the way that the souls move as Hermes escorts them into Hades:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Bats deep inside an eerie cave} \\
\textit{Flit and gibber when one of them falls} \\
\textit{From the cluster clinging to the rock overhead.}
\end{quote}

So too these ghosts, as Hermes led them

\begin{quote}
\ldots
Where the spirits of the dead dwell, phantoms
Of men outworn.
\end{quote}

(Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, trans. by Lombardo, Book 24, p. 365, lines 7-9, 10, 15-16)

While the souls pictured behind Agamemnon may represent those of the suitors in a closer adaptation of Homer, it may be more likely that they represent generic souls meant to stand as the idea of the substance of afterlife. In both the \textit{Iliad} and the \textit{Odyssey}, the act of dying appears as the separation of body and soul\footnote{An illustrative example is the death of Hector in \textit{Iliad} XXII: “Death’s veil covered him as he said these things, / And his soul, bound for Hades, fluttered out / Resentfully, forsaking manhood’s bloom.” Homer, \textit{Iliad}, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 22, pg. 434, lines 401-403.}—the body being the living organism that is

\begin{quote}
Arnobius Adversus Gentes.” Translated by Archibald Hamilton and Hugh Campbell. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1871, Book 2.62; Jannot, 4 and 65 puts the \textit{libri acheruntici} into context among the other \textit{libri tagetici}, the sacred books of the Etruscans as described by Cicero, \textit{De Div.}, 2.23.
\end{quote}
perceptible, and the soul encompassing the personality, intellect, consciousness, and vitality of an individual. The adherents to the philosophies of Orphism and Pythagoreanism were concerned with the essence and fate of this latter portion of a human’s life.\textsuperscript{191} While both Orphism and Pythagoreanism lack a standardized creed of beliefs,\textsuperscript{192} they align along their shared notion of metempsychosis, the belief that a person is made of both body and soul and that, upon death, the two parts are separated.\textsuperscript{193} While the body is of material that decays over time, the soul has an aspect of immortality that persists beyond physical death. Such ideas were present in Etruria well before the construction of the Tomb of Orcus. Some evidence exists that the communities of Pythagoreans in Magna Graecia influenced Etruscan art and culture as early as the sixth century BCE.\textsuperscript{194} Later, Orphic ideas included a canon of mythology that surrounded the \textit{katabasis} of Orpheus into the Underworld to retrieve his deceased love, Eurydice, from Hades and Persephone.\textsuperscript{195} Both Orpheus and Persephone played central roles in the Orphists’ understanding of the afterlife.\textsuperscript{196} Rituals and enchantments were important to the proper initiation into the society of believers, and into the promise of a life beyond the dim realm of the shades.\textsuperscript{197} In the


\textsuperscript{192} Radcliffe Guest Edmonds, “Sacred scripture or oracles for the dead? The semiotic situation of the ‘Orphic’ gold tablets,” in \textit{The ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets and Greek Religion: Further Along the Path}. Edited by Radcliffe Guest Edmonds III. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 257-270. Radcliffe has compiled a thorough study of Orphism and the small pieces of gold foil bearing inscriptions pointing to an Orphic set of beliefs, often found in funerary contexts.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid, 120-165; Zhmud, 207-238.


\textsuperscript{195} Apollodorus, I.3.2. Like Herakles kidnapping Cerberus, Orpheus was able to charm the guard dog of Hades with a song and his lyre. Both Herakles and Orpheus represent the heroic act of suspending the rules of life and death, if just for a moment, and so promise the possibility of hope for the soul after death; C. C. van Essen, 42-45.

\textsuperscript{196} Alberto Bernabé and Ana I. Jiménez San Cristóbal, “Are the ‘Orphic’ gold leaves Orphic?” in Radcliffe Guest Edmonds, 95-101. For a look at the Etruscan interpretation of the figure of Orpheus, see De Grummond, 32-37 and 33-34 Figures II.10-11. On a number of bronze mirrors from late fourth century BCE Etruria, the talking head of Orpheus appears. According to myth, Orpheus’ head made pronouncements even after it had been separated from his body when frenzied women dismembered the poet.

image of the tree with the bouncing humanoid figures, the Tomb of Orcus II presents the image of those who are not living, though they are not mythological characters like Agamemnon, Tiresias, Theseus and the other heroes pictured. The souls are somewhere in a form of suspended existence—indistinct from one another, but certainly present in their dynamism in Hades.

Six discernible figures leap through the branches of the tree in the background of Orcus II’s left wall. The souls seem to be leaping, diving, sitting, and reaching to one another. While their diminutive size connotes either distance, or possibly importance, their body language represents a childlike playfulness that sets the figures apart from the seriousness of the foreground. The diving image in particular reflects the strong lines and freedom of movement of the southern Italian Tomb of the Diver, a Greek chamber tomb discovered in Paestum, then Poseidonia, and dating from the fifth century BCE (Figure 19). In that tomb, a young man leaps from a promontory down into a pool of water, symbolizing the leap into death and the prospect of a new beginning in the afterlife. The notion of diving as both an act of lovesickness and of a transformative leap from life into death had been around in both art and in literature well before the construction of the Tomb of Orcus. In the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing in Tarquinia, a single diver is pictured on a wall fresco from the late sixth century BCE (Figure 20). The young man leaps into a pool of water vividly drawn in a representation of the natural world.199

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199 R. Ross Holloway, “Conventions of Etruscan Painting in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing at Tarquinii.” *American Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 69 (4). pp. 341-347. Boston: 1965. Holloway emphasizes the Etruscan depiction of the human body, especially the diving young man, as diminutive in size against a wide-angle background representing the vastness of the natural world. In his article on the Tomb of the Diver (2006), Holloway downplays comparisons among the two diving figures, saying that the image from Paestum had more of a symbolic meaning in terms of the leap into the afterlife, whereas the Tarquinian diver is a more superficial representation. “How different is this concept of decoration in the tomb from that of the Paestan image of the diver, caught alone in the moment of death but assuring the occupant of the tomb lying below that death is a brief passage to the further shore, as is argued below. It is difficult to imagine that the Etruscan diver could have been the bearer of any symbolic reference, especially symbolic reference to Greek legend or belief. A similar image was thus employed, in one case in Tarquinia, in the other at Paestum, in different contexts and for very different purposes.” Holloway
The White Rock, the Rock of Leucas, was seen as physical geography that could embody the connection between love and death in the one act of leaping into the sea from its heights. In the Homeric *Odyssey*, the souls of the dead suitors speed past the “White Rock” on their way down into Hades. The rock has meaning as a marker between the living and the dead. That it lies in the west is also a meaningful connection between the rock and the sun, more specifically the setting sun and its significance for the imagery of death. Such imagery would also connect the dead with the story of Geryon, whose home island Erytheia was raided by Herakles in pursuit of the giant’s cattle.

The leaping souls suggest not only the weightlessness of human existence after physical death, and the separation of the body from the spirit, but another aspect of the Orphic or Pythagorean schools of philosophy—that the disembodied soul might perhaps find animation once more in another form, a possibility of rebirth. The absence of any other evidence makes a direct connection between the images in the Tomb of Orcus and a spiritual belief in rebirth difficult, though the tiny bouncing souls offer an alluring clue. In his article, “The Tomb of the Diver,” R. Ross Holloway suggests that the wholesale subscription of an individual to a specific

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(2006), 375. In light of the Etruscans’ well-developed sense of representative art in their painted tombs, this attitude seems a bit too dismissive of the possibility that the Etruscan diver means more than just what is shown.

200 Strabo, 452.9 speaks of the Leucatas Rock, a white cliff on the island of Leucas in western Anatolia, where “the Leap” was believed to put an end to the pain of love. Strabo quotes Menander’s account of Sappho having jumped to her death from the rock to end her suffering from an unrequited love. Menander, *Leukadia*, Edited and translated by W. G. Arnott. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997, lines 10-14. “Where ’tis said Sappho first, when pursuing her / proud / High and mighty Phaon, in her frenzied desire / Threw herself from the cliff that an eye can discern / From afar.”

201 Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 24, pg. 365, lines 11-16.

202 For a comprehensive exposition of the layers of meaning in the image of the Rock of Leukas, of Sappho’s lover’s leap, and of the literary geography of it, see Gregory Nagy, “Phaethon, Sappho’s Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* (Vol. 77). Cambridge: Department of the Classics, Harvard University, 1973, pp. 137-177. Nagy connects the account of Sappho’s leap with the other instances in which Greek poetry uses the Leukas Rock as a marker for the connection between life and death, as the gates of the sun, and as it appears in the Homeric tradition.

203 Herodotus, Histories, II.124. Herodotus speaks of this concept in his discussion of the Egyptians’ belief in the transmigration of souls and in reincarnation. He ends by mentioning that there are certain Greeks who have similar beliefs, but he declines to name any; Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972, 181-184; Zhmud, 225-238.
set of religious beliefs was not necessary to have some aspects of religious beliefs or a spiritual philosophy present in the tomb’s imagery. Instead, the artists at work may have received generalized instructions for an overall theme, and they chose the specific images based upon their current sensibilities. Speaking about the Paestan “Tomb of the Diver,” Holloway expresses the owners’ instructions to the artists thusly: “…they did not dictate the precise imagery of an Orphic cult or Pythagorean brotherhood, except to the extent that the notions promoted by these groups had permeated the popular imagination of the day.”

Almost two centuries later in Tarquinia, a similar circumstance may have prompted the paintings on the wall of Orcus II to reflect a prevailing attitude about the separation of body and soul, and of the fate of the soul after death to appear as the tiny figures in the tree.

Virgil, writing three centuries after the Tomb of Orcus was painted, used similar imagery in his exposition of the underworld, in particular the collection of dispossessed souls awaiting their spiritual and physical rebirth as future generations of Romans. Just as Theseus and Pirithous had been entrapped upon a Chair of Forgetfulness, so too do the souls in Virgil’s account need to cleanse themselves of their previous lives and memories, and so prepare themselves for their renewed lives.

The river Lethe—and around it hovered
Nations of souls, innumerable

As bees on a cloudless summer day
That settle upon wildflowers in a field
And swarm so thickly around the white lilies
That the whole meadow hums and murmurs.

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204 Holloway (2006), 386.
Aeneas was shaken at the sight
And asked, in his ignorance, the reason
For this congregation. What was the river,
And who were the men crowding its banks?
Father Anchises answered:

“There are the souls owed another body by Fate.
In the ripples of Lethe they sip the waters
Of forgetfulness and timeless oblivion.
I have been longing to show them to you,
The census of my generations, so that you
May rejoice as I do at finding Italy.”

“Father, can it be that souls go from here
To the world above and return again
To their gross bodies?”

(Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 6, pg. 154, lines 835-854)

While Virgil certainly used the literary device of foreshadowing events yet to happen in
the timeframe of the narrative to address facts that had already happened in his lifetime, he may
also be exploring a theme that had been part of the culture and related to the Orphic or
Pythagorean beliefs surrounding rebirth and the reincarnation of souls. In his epic, the
sequence of events leads Virgil to the coming of Augustus Caesar and the advent of the Roman
Empire. For the artists of the Tomb of Orcus II, there may also be the foreshadowing of events
left unresolved in the world of the living. At the end of the fourth century BCE, Tarquinia was in
an existential battle with the Romans, just as the Greeks were fighting off Roman encroachment
in southern Italy. As the world of Etruria became unstable and subject to events outside of their
control, the elites would have been searching for ways to cope with a new set of circumstances.
Elements in each of the myths depicted on the walls of Orcus II hint at unfinished business for
each of the characters present in the burial space. For Theseus and Pirithous, the Dioscuri would

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206 Ibid.
207 Miles, 96-115.
be racing to Athens to take back their sister Helen, just recently kidnapped by Theseus as a suitable wife, and the other part of the two friends’ bargain that led Theseus to accompany Pirithous in his ill-fated mission to take Persephone from Hades. The symbolism of Helen’s egg, and eggs in general, holds meaning for both Orphism and for fertility and vitality, as seen in several examples of Etruscan mirrors and other tomb paintings. Upon his return, Theseus will have to fight once again to take Helen back and to reclaim his rightful place in Athens. Likewise, Odysseus will have to fight for his place as Penelope’s husband and the ruler of Ithaca after he returns home. The image of Odysseus striking the Cyclops in the eye marks the precise moment at which the hero’s journey home begins along the lines of the Odyssey’s narrative story arc.

On the wall showing Hades and Persephone, Geryon reminds the viewer that Herakles is loose and in the process of returning home with the stolen cattle. Having been wronged, Geryon surely would have been desirous of revenge. Finally, the clearest indicator of the dead having a stake in events following death would have been the figure of Agamemnon. The entire cycle of the Oresteia recounts the mythical canon of Agamemnon’s violently dysfunctional family, at once devoted and homicidal among themselves. In Odyssey XI, Agamemnon’s words to Odysseus are personal and haunting—that women are to be watched and never trusted. His own experience illustrated the danger inherent in a marriage both cursed and devoid of trust. For the Etruscans of the fourth century BCE, the message might also apply to their cities’ foreign relations, or even to the jockeying for status and prestige among Etruscan noble families at a time when Roman hegemony loomed large, threatening to limit all aristocratic aspirations. In a space dominated by myth, and by supernatural considerations, the real world comes into focus in light of the words of Zeus in Odyssey I. Mulling over the tragic events of the House of Atreus,

\[209\] De Grummond, 126-128, and 127-129 Figures VI.16-19; Steingräber, 94.
Zeus makes absolutely clear the role humans play in their interactions with one another, among family members, or even among civilizations.

He couldn’t stop thinking of Aegisthus,
Whom Agamemnon’s son, Orestes, had killed:

“Mortals! They are always blaming the gods
For their troubles, when their own witlessness
Causes them more than they were destined for!
Take Aegisthus now. He marries Agamemnon’s
Lawful wife and murders the man on his return
Knowing it meant disaster—because we did warn him,
Sent our messenger, quicksilver Hermes,
To tell him not to kill the man and marry his wife,
Or Agamemnon’s son, Orestes, would pay him back
When he came of age and wanted his inheritance.
Hermes told him all that, but his good advice
Meant nothing to Aegisthus. Now he’s paid in full.”
(Homer, Odyssey, trans. by Lombardo, Bk. 1, pg. 2, lines 35-48)

At this point, the discussion of the Tomb of Orcus moves from the interpretation of wall paintings through a cultural and artistic lens, and on to an examination of the owners of the burial space itself. If the imagery of the tomb reflects the attitudes and beliefs of the owners, then a closer look at the evidence would offer further insight into who the Tarquinian elite family was that created the tomb, and how the world in which they operated appeared to them.
Chapter 10: The Fall of the House of Spurinna: The Politics of Death in Tarquinia

The attribution of the Tomb of Orcus usually centers upon the Spurinna family of Tarquinia, a well-attested politically active family of local magistrates whose members included a military leader of Etruscan troops aiding in the Athenian invasion of Sicily, a succession of municipal leaders, a Roman nobleman admired by Pliny the Elder, and possibly the haruspex who, according to tradition, tried to warn Julius Caesar to, “beware the Ides of March.” While the evidence is scant of who exactly owned the Tomb of Orcus and at what time each family member may have been interred in the burial space is unclear, clues emerge from the inscriptions found in the Tomb of Orcus I, some of the imagery in Orcus II, and corroborating inscriptions and texts. Because the owners of the Tomb of Orcus were surely members of the Etruscan elite class, their fortunes would correspond with those of the city. The family, like the city, would have had a deepening connection with the Romans as the territory of central Italy became more aligned with Roman power as the fourth century BCE came to a close. The Spurinna family of Tarquinia is more visible through evidence from the later part of the fifth century BCE and into the fourth, and then retrospectively later during Roman times. The major points of attention in the family’s prominence include the leadership of an Etruscan contingent supporting Athens’ invasion of Sicily, the holding of mid and high level offices in the city of Tarquinia, and the building and decoration of the Tomb of Orcus. Within the tomb, the older burial space contains the best evidence for the identity of the owners and their high social status.

while the wall paintings of Orcus II leave only clues to be interpreted from the imagery and its themes.

In the Tomb of Orcus I, the most instructive evidence comes from the partial inscriptions on the walls designed to identify the family members depicted in the banquet scene, and their honorary titles. Since most of the inscriptions are missing letters or incomplete, Etruscologists must make educated guesses about what the words and names may have been, usually by comparing known inscriptions from other tombs and texts that relate to the same people or members of the same family.\textsuperscript{211} Due to the nature of aristocracy, a limited number of families were numbered among the Tarquinian elite, and therefore intermarriage was common.\textsuperscript{212} The result was to have a few family names reappear among the elite’s burial chambers. The names appearing in the Tomb of Orcus I include Spurinna (or Spurina), Velcha, Larth, Ravnthu Thefrinai, and Velia, along with the title ‘zilath mechl rasnal.’ Haynes reconstructs the familial situation as Ravnthu Thefrinai the matriarch sitting among her descendants, including Larth and Velia Velcha. All are members of the Spurinna family, with Velia Velcha’s portrait being the best-known image from the Tomb of Orcus I, and Larth having held the office of zilath mechl rasnal, approximately commensurate with a Roman praetorship.\textsuperscript{213} Haynes also cites new evidence that the Spurinna family name, with the first two letters missing, might be read as Murina instead.\textsuperscript{214} The Murina family is believed to be an offshoot of the same Spurinna family, so the discussion is less about which family owned the tomb and more about which familial line and their proper appellation.\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{211} Mario Torelli, \textit{Elogia Tarquiniensia}. Firenze: Sansoni, 1975, 30-56.
\textsuperscript{212} Steingräber, 322 includes a Prosopographic Index of Family Names from Hellenistic Tarquinia.
\textsuperscript{214} Haynes, 312-313.
\textsuperscript{215} For the new understanding of the Murina name of the family occupying the Tomb of Orcus I, see M. Morandi and G. Colonna. “La gens titolare della tomba tarquiniense dell’Orco,” in Studi Etruschi (61), pp. 95-102.
The history of the Spurinna family is first recorded as part of the Peloponnesian War in the last part of the fifth century BCE.\textsuperscript{216} At that time, Tarquinia and the other cities of the Etruscan League were experiencing increased urbanization as people were moving into the cities from the countryside. Like Rome, Etruscan cities experienced a change in the relationship between classes, with the elites having to adjust their interactions with the increasingly powerful and numerous lower classes.\textsuperscript{217} During the Athenian invasion of Sicily, the city of Tarquinia supported the siege of its enemy Syracuse at the forefront of Etruscan forces.\textsuperscript{218} The two following passages from Thucydides are illustrative of the Greek view of the roles played by Etruscan forces, roles that brought honor and prestige to Velthur Spurinna among the leadership of Tarquinia.

“Meanwhile the Athenians moved their winter quarters from Naxos to Catana, and reconstructed the camp burnt by the Syracusans, and stayed there the rest of the winter. They also sent a trireme to Carthage, with offers of friendship, on the chance of obtaining assistance, and another to Tyrrenia; some of the cities there having spontaneously offered to join them in the war.”

\textit{(Thucydides, Peloponnesian War, trans. by Crawley, Bk. 6 Ch. 88.5-6)}

“Gylippus seeing the enemy’s fleet defeated and carried ashore beyond their stockades and camp, ran down to the breakwater with some of his troops, in order to cut off the men as they landed and make it easier for the Syracusans to tow off the vessels by the shore being friendly to the group. The Tyrrenians who guarded this point for the Athenians seeing them come on in disorder, advanced out against them and attacked and routed their van, hurling it into the marsh of Lysimeleia.

\textit{(Thucydides, Peloponnesian War, trans. by Crawley, Bk. 7 Ch. 53.1-2)}

\textsuperscript{218} Thucydides, 6.88.6, 7.53.2, and 7.57.11. While his account does not go into great detail about their forces, Thucydides refers to the Etruscans as Tyrrenians and lists them among the forces attacking the armies of Syracuse in 413 BCE. In his reading of the \textit{elogia tarquiniensia}, Mario Torelli makes the connection between the Etruscan contingent in Sicily and the leadership of Velthur Spurinna of Tarquinia. Mario Torelli, \textit{Elogia Tarquiniensia}. Firenze: Sansoni, 1975, 30-56.
Torelli posits that the leadership of Tarquinia signified that the city held a position of preeminence among the other Etruscan cities.219 The family reappears when the grandson of Velthur Spurinna, Aulus, leads an Etruscan army against the forces of Rome in a local dispute involving the city of Caere in the mid fourth century BCE. Again, the city of Tarquinia assumed a leadership role among the twelve cities of Etruria.220 Around this time, the office of zilath appears in inscriptions as a magistrate with responsibilities for the area of Etruria. The title is written among the inscriptions of the Tomb of Orcus I and the contemporary Golini Tomb of Orvieto. After the last part of the fourth century BCE, the Spurinna family loses its status among the surviving written evidence and, along with the rest of the Etruscan elites, the family would have assimilated into Roman culture over the course of the third century BCE.221 The grand flourishing of the city of Tarquinia occurred between the time of the Sicilian invasion in the latter part of the fifth century BCE and the end of the fourth century BCE.

Two milestone events in Roman and Etruscan history were the Roman conquest of Veii in 396 BCE and the Gallic sack of Rome in 387 BCE.222 The two events, only a few years apart, demonstrate the precariousness of the balance of power in central Italy in the beginning of the fourth century BCE, a world in which Tarquinia’s role would not be consistently secure. In taking Veii, the Romans removed a major competitor to Tarquinia’s hegemonic ambitions in Etruria, but Rome also proved its status as a dangerously ambitious city with territorial aims on central Italy. As the century progressed, the Romans and Tarquinians mostly maintained a nonviolent relationship bolstered by two 40-year peace treaties, with the notable exception of

219 Torelli in Bonfante (1986), 57-58; Livy, A. U. C. 5.1-5.55.
220 Ibid; Livy, A. U. C. 7.17.
221 Haynes, 327-332.
222 Livy, A. U. C. 5.55; Torelli in Bonfante (1986), 58-59
hostilities in the 350s BCE and again in 311-308 BCE. Torelli ascribes revenge as a partial motive for both of these conflicts as Tarquinia sought to punish Rome’s dispossession of Tarquinia’s dominance of the Etruscan League. The elites of Tarquinia must have found the intrusion of Roman forces into the space once occupied by Veii jarring. Even in its lowest moment after the sacking of Rome by Brennus’ Gauls, Roman leaders considered relocating the functions of government north to Veii, though how seriously this prospect was considered is not clear. Livy recounts a fierce argument against the abandonment of Rome in favor of Veii in the aftermath of the sack.

“Do you never think what a sacrilege you are about? The Vestals surely have but that one dwelling-place, from which nothing ever caused them to remove but the capture of the City; the Flamen Dialis may not lie for a single night outside the City, without sin. Will you make these priests Veiente instead of Roman? Shall thy Virgins forsake thee, Vesta, and the Flamen, as he dwells abroad, bring, night after night, such guilt upon himself and the republic? What about the other matters nearly all of which we transact, after taking auspices, within the pomerium? To what oblivion and neglect do we consign them? The curiate comitia which deals with the business of war, the centuriate comitia, where you elect the consuls and military tribunes—where can these be held, with due observance of the auspices, save in the customary places? Shall we transfer them to Veii? Or shall the people, for the sake of the comitia assemble with enormous inconvenience in this City, forsaken of god and man?”

(Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, trans. by Foster, Bk. 5. Ch. 55, lines 11-19)

Though the Romans may never have been in favor of actually moving their city, the fact that it was even considered an option is a comment on the state of affairs for both Rome and Etruria. After rebuilding its city and its power base in Rome, Roman leadership turned its sights southward to move into territory held by the Samnites and Greeks. In that space, Tarquinia saw a respite from danger and building projects like the construction of the massive Ara della Regina

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223 Ibid.
224 Miles, 157-161.
marked a time of revival for the city. By then end of the fourth century BCE, a gloomier outlook was reflected in the Tomb of Orcus II and the Golini Tomb, both of which were owned by members of the same Tarquinian elite family. While views about the afterlife mirrored views about Tarquinia’s future, an unsure Etruscan leadership observed Rome’s overpowering of the Samnite tribes, its ventures into southern Italy and Sicily, and its growing conflict with the powerful city-state of Carthage. By the middle of the third century BCE, each one of these interactions would have been settled to the satisfaction and advantage of Rome. By the end of the third century BCE, Tarquinia, as most of Etruria, would be under Rome’s complete control, and the process of integration and assimilation that would eventually erase most of the Etruscans’ cultural independence was well underway.

The Tomb of Orcus II, built in the last years of the fourth century BCE, reflects the uneasiness, decline, and nostalgia of the Tarquinian elite. The wall paintings hint at specific instances of the Spurinna family’s past glory, and the spiritual beliefs surrounding escape, rescue, rebirth, and eternity may all apply to Tarquinia’s geopolitical situation. First, the Tomb’s implication that the deceased were in some ways connected to the Greek heroic past emphasizes the need to look back for inspiration while looking to an unsure future. While Odysseus, Herakles, Theseus, and Agamemnon symbolize the greatness of heroic deeds, so does Velthur Spurinna represent the bravery and intrepid spirit of Tarquinian leadership. Second, the connection that the occupants of the tomb felt with their Athenian Greek allies strongly influences the choices of specific characters and themes among the wall paintings. Just as Theseus and Pirithous descended into Hades on a doomed mission, so did Etruria support Athens...
in a catastrophic attempt to invade Sicily.\textsuperscript{230} Both experienced a long, slow decline after the failure of the mission. With the hindsight of more than a century, the Etruscans were able to take a sanguine look at the futility of their enterprise, if still appreciating its daring nature. Third, the island of Sicily looms large in the imagery of the tomb. Some ancient writers hold that the Cyclops lived on the island, and that it was the location of Odysseus’ blinding of the monster.\textsuperscript{231} Through its connection with the cattle of Helios, Sicily derived meaning from the myth of the cattle of Geryon as well. The two mythical devices have solar implications that hint at the cycle of life and death.\textsuperscript{232} Along these lines, Persephone is also associated with the island of Sicily, especially in her role as \textit{Kore}, the young virginal daughter of Demeter.\textsuperscript{233}

Again, the fact that the Rape of Corê took place in Sicily is, men say, proof most evident that the goddesses made this island their favourite retreat because it was cherished by them before all others. And the Rape of Corê, the myth relates, took place in the meadows in the territory of Enna.

(Diodorus Siculus, \textit{The Library of History}, trans by. Oldfather, Bk. 5.3.1-2)

Finally, the theme of heroic escape and rescue may have implications for the advent of Greek leaders whose exploits may in the distant future challenge Roman domination.\textsuperscript{234} Both Alexander the Great and Pyrrhus of Epirus represent Hellenic military forces that may have given some hope to the enemies of Rome that the Greek heroic past might be revived. Although

\textsuperscript{230} For the definitive account of the disastrous invasion of Sicily by Athens, see Donald Kagan. \textit{The Peloponnesian War}. New York: Viking, 2003, 251-324.
\textsuperscript{231} Euripides, \textit{Cyclops}, line 599; Thucydides 6.2.1
\textsuperscript{234} Miles, 139-143; Plutarch, \textit{Life of Alexander} and \textit{Life of Pyrrhus of Epirus}. 103
Alexander died before returning westward to Greece, he used similar heroic imagery as the
owners of the Tomb of Orcus II to associate himself with the divine heroes of myth. Pyrrhus,
although not really a threat to Rome until the beginning of the third century BCE, may have
renewed hopes that a rescuer of Heraklean proportions might free Tarquinia from the coercion of
Rome, just as Herakles had lifted Theseus from the Rock of Forgetfulness. In all of these
connections, Greek mythology is used to illustrate the possibilities of the future along the lines of
the heroic past.

While the Tomb of Orcus II marks the last part of Etruscan Tarquinia’s independence,
instances of the Spurinna family’s successful integration into later Roman society exist, both
indicating the larger diffusion of the Etruscan cultural elites into the Roman world. The first is
the account of Spurinna, the haruspex who tried to warn Julius Caesar to beware of danger on the
Ides of March. Even if the story is apocryphal, it speaks to the role of the Tarquinian mystical
practice of haruspicy and its place in Roman culture. The other is the friend of Pliny the Elder
and recipient of Pliny the Younger’s praise for noble old age. Titus Vestricius Spurinna was the
model of an elderly nobleman who lived a full life and knew how to enjoy retirement. That he
was twice consul, held high military office in the first century CE and would be friendly with
Pliny illustrates the high status of the Spurinna descendant even three centuries after the Tomb of
Orcus II had been completed. In Tarquinia, archaeologists have unearthed Augustan period

235 Boris Dreyer, “Heroes, Cults, and Divinity,” in Alexander the Great: A New History. Edited by Waldemar Heckel
237 Cicero, Fam. 9.24.2 and De Div. 1.119; For an explanation of the details and their significance, see Maridien
Schneider, Cicero: “haruspex”: Political Prognostication and the Viscera of a Deceased Body Politic. Piscataway:
238 John Franklin Hall, “From Tarquins to Caesars: Etruscan Governance at Rome,” in Etruscan Italy: Etruscan
Influences on the Civilizations of Italy from Antiquity to the Modern Era. Edited by John Franklin Hall. Provo:
Brigham Young University, 1996, 149-190.
239 Pliny the Younger, Letters 3.1 and 5.17
evidence of a monument to the luminaries of the Spurinna family erected\textsuperscript{240} by another
descendant to honor their memories and perhaps indulge some of the nostalgia for Tarquinian
greatness that the Tomb of Orcus hints at.

\textsuperscript{240} Mario Torelli, \textit{Elogia Tarquiniensi}. Firenze: Sansoni, 1975, 30-56.
Chapter 11: Avenues for Future Scholarship on the Tomb of Orcus

The greatest challenge for archaeologists and scholars working to understand and better appreciate the Tomb of Orcus must be the preservation and protection of the physical space of the burial chambers and their wall paintings. Already damaged upon its discovery in the mid nineteenth century, the tomb is in a precarious state and in need of interventions to keep it intact and avoid the very real possibility of future collapses like the one that has occurred in the area of Orcus III. The presence of visitors to the tombs also threatens dangerously fluctuating moisture levels and degradation of the murals through exposure to changing environmental conditions.241 Currently, the Soprintendenza keeps the tomb closed to tourists generally, but allows for privately reserved tours of small groups, as well as selective opening of the site only on certain holidays or festivals held by the local government to celebrate Tarquinia’s patrimony. Along with sorely needed site preservation, high-resolution photography and 3-D laser scanning would help keep a digital record of the space that would exist even if the damage within the tomb worsened. At this time, most of the available photography of the tomb’s wall paintings consists of older analog photography, and primarily that of Stephan Steingräber in his Abundance of Life: Etruscan Wall Painting that was originally published in German in 1986. In the available imagery of the Tomb of Orcus, the context for each wall’s painting is lost without a more detailed record of where each scene appears within the burial space. Lastly, because the fragmentary sections of the tomb painting are less interesting to the casual observer,

photographic evidence of those sections is difficult to find. With better photography and digital
scans, it may be possible to make better guesses about what the missing wall paintings used to
show.

Another area for further study includes a deeper look into the Spurinna family and an
attempt to better reconstruct the history of the family from the fifth century BCE until Roman
times. Presently, Mario Torelli has been tasked with exactly that work by the Villa Giulia
National Etruscan Museum in Rome. On January 10, 2013, the museum held a press conference
to announce the new approach Torelli intended to pursue in researching the Spurinna.242 With
the working thesis that the Spurinna family did own the Tomb of Orcus, Torelli believes that at
some point towards the end of the fourth century BCE the family was expelled from the city of
Tarquinia after a peace treaty with Rome settled the conflict that had occurred there in 311-308
BCE and ending with a 40-year truce. Torelli also believes that the images within the Tomb of
Orcus were purposefully destroyed in a form of damnatio memoriae inflicted on the Spurinna.243
In order to prove his theory, Torelli would need to find evidence of the destruction in the tomb,
including chunks of plaster either through excavation or microscopic analysis. If the Spurinna
were exiled from the city in the fourth century BCE, why was the elogia Tarquiniensia, a series
of statues of prominent Spurinna men, erected in the area of the Ara della Regina (Figure 36)?
The Spurinna also enjoyed a renewed status with the consulships of Titus Vestricius Spurinna in
the first century CE. That would need to be explained. In general, however, the pursuit of the
history of the Tomb of Orcus by tracing back the Spurinna family tree may be worthwhile. One
branch, the Murina family alluded to by Morandi and Colonna, would need to be put into
context, whether as original owners of the tomb, or as the ones who collapsed the space between

242 Chiara Morciano, “L’archeologo Mario Torelli: svelato il mistero degli Etruschi.” Il Messaggero, 4 January,
2013.
243 Ibid.
Orcus I and Orcus II to refurbish the entire burial space. By better understanding the tomb’s owners, scholars will be able to consider the cultural, religious, and political influences that went into the tomb’s artwork. Perhaps then we will be able to trace the sources of ideas like Orphism or Pythagoreanism back to their origins.

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Conclusion

After a prolonged sightseeing tour of Etruscan tombs in Tarquinia and nearby cities, D. H. Lawrence reflected on the stylistic and attitudinal changes that he observed after having seen the Tomb of Orcus.

Then suddenly we come to the Tomb of Orcus, or Hell, which is given the fourth century as a date, and here the whole thing utterly changes. You get a great gloomy, clumsy, rambling sort of underworld, damp and horrid, with large but much-damaged pictures on the walls.

These paintings, though they are interesting in their way, and have scribbled Etruscan inscriptions, have suddenly lost all Etruscan charm. They still have a bit of Etruscan freedom, but on the whole they are Greco-Roman, half suggesting Pompeian, half suggesting Roman things. They are more free than the paintings of the little old tombs; at the same time, all the motion is gone; the figures are stuck there without any vital flow between them. There is no touch.

In the Tomb of Orcus begins that representation of the grisly underworld, hell and its horrors, which surely was reflected on to the Etruscans from the grisly Romans. The lovely little tombs of just one small chamber, or perhaps two chambers, of the earlier centuries give way to these great sinister caverns underground, and hell is fitly introduced.

The old religion of the profound attempt of man to harmonize himself with nature, and hold his own and come to flower in the great seething of life, changed with the Greeks and Romans into a desire to resist nature, to produce a mental cunning and a mechanical force that would outwit Nature and chain her down completely, completely, till at last there should be nothing free in nature at all, all should be controlled, domesticated, put to man’s meaner uses. Curiously enough, with the idea of the triumph over nature arose the idea of a gloomy Hades, a hell and purgatory. To the peoples of the great natural religions the after-life was a continuing of the wonder-journey of life. To the peoples of the Idea the afterlife is hell, or purgatory, or nothingness, and paradise is an inadequate fiction. But, naturally enough, historians seized on these essentially non-Etruscan evidences, in the Etruscan late tombs, to build up a picture of a gloomy, hellish, serpent-writhing, vicious Etruscan people who were quite rightly stamped out by the
noble Romans. This myth is still not dead. Men never want to believe the evidence of their senses. They would far rather go on elaborating some ‘classical’ author. The whole science of history seems to be the picking of old fables and old lies into fine threads, and weaving them up again.

(Lawrence, and Filippis, Sketches of Etruscan Places, pp. 128-131)

The Tomb of Orcus is an illustration of the fourth century BCE world of an elite Etruscan family—its religious beliefs, family structure, political status, and anxieties about the future. Over the course of a century, the city of Tarquinia gradually lost its independence to the growing ambition of Rome. At the same time, the visual imagery of Greek mythology was being used to promote Hellenistic ideas about death and the afterlife. The burial chamber of Orcus I reflects a transitional period when traditional Etruscan funerary images of banquets and nature scenes were giving way to a gloomier atmosphere. The elites continued to attend grand feasts, but the symbolism of death intruded in the forms of Hades and Persephone, of demons and Charun, the gate-keeper. No longer did dancing and music play as important a role as it once had in Etruscan tombs. Instead, the solemn, almost sneering, face of Velia Velcha looks forward into the underworld landscape. She is a woman whose family stood proud among its city’s citizens. Soon after her burial, though, the circumstances began to change rapidly for her family and for her city.

The Tomb of Orcus II illustrates the maturation of ideas concerning the gloominess of the underworld, its structure based on Greek myth and Hellenistic beliefs. The images on the wall promise the occupants of the tomb a type of reflected glory by association. The family occupying the tomb wants to connect their status and history with the heroic past at a time when the heroic past looked so much better than the unsure present. As the Romans grew to be an unstoppable force in central and southern Italy, the late fourth century BCE seemed to be a time of
realization; the aristocracy of Tarquinia recognized that their city would no longer dominate Etruria the way it once had. Instead a new power, one that did not share the Etruscan language, religion, or connection to the heroic Greek past, was rising exponentially. If only Tiresias had been able to offer the Tarquinians advice on how to thwart Rome and survive as an independent city-state.

The religious beliefs and mythological imagery displayed in the Tomb of Orcus II allows only a limited understanding of the tomb owners’ true intentions. Instead, by looking at the specific characters and the juxtaposition of the different scenes is a hazy picture emergent among the gloom. Themes of escape, rescue, and despair commingle in the burial space. Theseus and Pirithous are locked in position, a horrific demon menacing them with snakes cackling nearby. Odysseus is in the fight of his life to blind the Cyclops and escape the cave and certain death. Agamemnon, still bandaged from his wounds, suffered the terrible injustice of a treacherous wife destroying his glorious homecoming and now stands blankly staring ahead. Tiresias, blind but still possessing his foresight, awaits the questioning of the tomb’s occupants. He is able to offer advice to others, but is powerless to do anything to save himself. Finally, Persephone and Hades sit patiently and listen as Geryon, in armor and at attention, explains how the hero Herakles killed him, his dog, and his cowherd while rustling his special cattle away from him and back to Greece. Hades may sense that Herakles will be visiting him next, to kidnap his dog and make a mockery of the infernal order he has established among the shades of the dead. All of these characters and scenes tell the story of those who wish to be free, free from injustice, free from their powerlessness, and free from death. While we know that the owners of the Tomb of Orcus II ordered the decorations to reflect their ideas about the afterlife, the more interesting point is why they might have wanted such dismaying scenes.
Just behind Agamemnon and Tiresias, among the marsh reeds of the River Acheron, is one image of dynamic movement that catches the eye. It stands out for its playful jumping and frolicking human figures, miniature black souls that leap from branch to branch like squirrel monkeys might. Their meaning is unclear, but they hint at the prospect of hope, or possibly an agnostic artistic device designed to present the deceased with an alternative vision. The artists, perhaps influenced by Orphic or Pythagorean ideas about the duality of human nature, focus on the living soul after the physical death of the body. The souls, newly airborne and free from the weight of their mortal substance, instinctively leap among the branches. The tiny souls might reflect a new way of being, or even hold the promise of renewed life, as Virgil will explore in his epic poetry over three centuries later. Just as Aeneas watched the swarm of honorable Romans yet to be born, so maybe did the valiant and noble Spurinnas watch as the promise of a new generation unfolded, and with it the possibility that new heroic acts would save the city and culture they so loved. Just as Theseus would be rescued, or Odysseus had fought his way from the Cyclops cave, so might the new generation of Tarquinia stand up to Rome and fight for their family, their gods, and their heroic Greek roots.

As the fourth century BCE turned into the third century BCE, the prospects for a Tarquinian revival seemed very bleak indeed. The Romans were on a seemingly inevitable march to greatness at the expense of the ancient cultures in central and southern Italy. The Tomb of Orcus displays damage and evidence that once built, the tomb needed to be reorganized to suit a new set of circumstances. Since its abandonment in the early third century BCE, the tomb has suffered significant damage, either purposeful or otherwise, even until its rediscovery in the nineteenth century. Something about the melancholy atmosphere, the great Greek heroes with their faces registering resignation and sadness, lends itself to a dire set of circumstances. The
tomb communicates its message not with a shout, but with a sigh—among the phantoms of men outworn. The construction and painting of the tomb coincided with a very consequential series of events within a fast-changing cultural and political landscape. The central Mediterranean, always a pivotal area of cultural and mercantile exchange, was rapidly developing into an area of influence of the newly-emboldened Roman Republic at the expense of older civilizations that had dominated the region’s cities and seas for centuries. These older civilizations, the Greeks of western Greece and southern Italy, along with the Etruscans and Phoenicians, were experiencing the onset of a decline in their power. Tarquinia especially sat at the intersection of Etruscan ambitions to reclaim past glory, the cultural diffusion of Greek mythology and the prestige that came with it, and the trade benefits of contacts with Phoenician colonies in Sardinia, Corsica, and Carthage. The Tomb of Orcus II is a uniquely Tarquinian product of the cultural legacy and shifting dynamics of central Italy and the Tyrrhenian Sea.
Figure 1: The Peoples of Italy (c. 300 BC), Ian Mladjov, University of Michigan.
Figure 2: Diagram of the Tomb of Orcus. Orcus I and Orcus II denote the two main burial spaces, Orcus I being the smaller and older. Originally separate, each with its own entrance, the tombs were joined by a small corridor. The connecting space is sometimes labeled as Orcus III, but it is not a distinct burial area.

Figure 3: Detail of Velia Velcha from the Tomb of Orcus I. She is offset by a cloudy gloom. (Reproduction, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: 1898). Photo from http://www.mfa.org.


Figure 6: Back wall of Orcus I that, although damaged, shows that an outdoor banquet scene once filled the space. Notice the lengthy inscription above, and the black gloom surrounding the couch. Photo by Robin Iversen Rönnlund, (Licensed under Creative Commons 3.0, 10 October 2012) as posted at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/](http://commons.wikimedia.org/)
Figure 7: A couple reclines together and enjoy a banquet while a servant fans them. Notice the lengthy inscription above them, and that they are passing an egg, a symbol of rebirth. Tomb of the Shields, late fourth century BCE, Tarquinia.


Figure 8: Two men recline with cups while musicians entertain them. There are inscriptions over each man, and labels for the small man and animal under the couch.

Figure 9: “Two dancers on the right wall (detail), Tomb of the Triclinium, c. 470 BCE, Etruscan chamber tomb, Tarquinia, Italy,” Jeffrey A. Becker, “Tomb of the Triclinium,” Kahn Academy. http://www.kahnacademy.org.

Figure 10: “Tarquinia, Tomb of the Leopards, right wall, left section of the wall with komast and aulos and lyre players, ca. 480 BCE.”, Stephan Steingräber. Abundance of Life: Etruscan Wall Painting. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006, pg. 133.
Figure 11: An image from an Etruscan vase depicting the parting of Admetus and Alcestis. The couple is tormented by the Etruscan death demons Charun, with mallet, and Tuchculcha, brandishing snakes.


Figure 12: Original Etruscan vase on which the farewell scene of Figure 11 appears.

Figure 13: The grisly figure of Charun, who opened and closed the gates of the underworld and usually brandished a mallet. His blue skin denoted the decay of death.

Figure 14: A nude male figure stands with a winged counterpart. To the right, an assortment of gold or bronze vessels stand ready for use, including two that have figures of Atlas in their design. The image is directly across from the image of Odysseus blinding the Cyclops.


Figure 15: Odysseus blinding the Cyclops in Tomb of Orcus II. The image is the source of the tomb’s name, as Cyclops was originally identified as an ogre. Notice the black line doorway just behind the massive and grotesque figure of Polyphemus. Photo by Robin Iversen Rönnlund, (Licensed under Creative Commons 3.0, 10 October 2012) as posted at http://commons.wikimedia.org.
Figure 16: In the Tomb of Orcus II, a wider view of the wall depicting the Cyclops’ blinding. To the left is a niche for funerary items and to the right is Orcus I. Notice the coffered ceiling. Photo by Prof. Ann Koloski-Ostrow and used with permission.
Figure 17: From left to right: The tip of a winged Vanth, Agamemnon, the shade of Tiresias, and fragments of Telamonic Ajax. Notice the six tiny humanoid figures bouncing among the bare tree’s branches between Agamemnon and Tiresias. Photo by Robin Iversen Rönnlund, (Licensed under Creative Commons 3.0, 10 October 2012) as posted at http://commons.wikimedia.org.

Figure 18: Detail view of Agamemnon and the tree with bouncing humanoid figures. Notice the dynamic movement and playfulness of the tiny figures contrasted with the seriousness of Agamemnon. Photo by Prof. Ann Koloski-Ostrow and used with permission.
Figure 19: Eponymous image from the Tomb of the Diver, a Greek burial panel in Paestum, in southern Italy. Notice the dynamism of the body with particular emphasis on a comparison to the tiny human figures in the tree shown in Figure 18. R. Ross Holloway, “The Tomb of the Diver.” *American Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 110 (3). Boston: 2006, pg. 372. Photo from [http://www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org).

Figure 21: Etruscan bronze mirror depicting the blind seer Tiresias led by Hermes psychopompus for a meeting with Odysseus.


Figure 22: Apulian krater depicting the nekyia of Odysseus. The hero consults with Tiresias (only his head is seen) while Perimedes and Eurylochus watch.

Figure 23: For his tenth labor, Herakles traveled westward to acquire the cattle of Geryon. He fought and killed Geryon along with the cattle’s guardian, Eurytion.

“Amphore à figures noires,” Amphora depicting the struggle between Herakles and Geryon, signed by Exekias the potter [Athens, Vulci], Musée du Louvre. (Acquisition: F 53) ca. 550-540 BCE. Photo from http://www.louvre.fr, cropped to show detail.

Figure 24 (front and obverse): Herakles uses poison-tipped arrows to kill Geryon, the three-headed giant. The guarddog Orthos lies dead on the ground between the two fighters.

Figure 25: According to some versions of the myth, Herakles traveled westward for his tenth labor in a cup given to him by Helios, the sun.


Figure 26: This Etruscan bronze mirror shows Herakles as a grown man nursing from Uni, the Etruscan counterpart of Hera.

Figure 27: This Hellenistic coin shows the face of Alexander wearing Herakles’ lion skin on the front, and an enthroned Zeus on the obverse. While certainly not the first to do so, Alexander associated his greatness with that of Herakles and Zeus.


Figure 28: While a much later example, the Roman emperor Commodus often merged his identity with that of Herakles. He is shown here wearing the hero’s lion skin and brandishing his club.

Figure 29: Geryon stands before Hades and Persephone as seen in the wall opposite the door of the Tomb of Orcus II. Despite the damage, Geryon’s finely detailed armor, and his triple head may be seen. While Hades wears the head of a wolf, his queen’s hair is entangled with snakes.

“Hades and Persephone attended by Geryon, Tomb of Orcus II (Tarquinia),” photo by Robin Iversen Rönnlund, (Licensed under Creative Commons 3.0, 10 October 2012) as posted at http://commons.wikimedia.org.

Figure 30: Detail view of Aita, the Etruscan counterpart of Hades. Here he wears the head of a wolf to signify his connection to death. His Etruscan name is inscribed on the left.

Figure 31: Theseus and Pirithous appear to play a game while the Etruscan demon Tuchulcha stands over them. Tuchulcha has a hooked nose, ugly wings, and brandishes snakes in each hand. While Pirithous is difficult to see due to damage, both Theseus and Tuchulcha are clearly named by the inscriptions above them.

“Tuchulcha and Theseus from the right wall of the Tomb of Orcus II, Tarquinia.” photo by Robin Iversen Rönnlund, (Licensed under Creative Commons 3.0, 10 October 2012) as posted at http://commons.wikimedia.org.
Figure 32: A closer view of Theseus from the Tomb of Orcus II. Tuchulcha’s arm, gripping a snake, hovers menacingly over Theseus’ head. Notice the ambiguous expression on the hero’s face—something between melancholy and boredom.


Figure 34: On this vessel, the hero Herakles rescues Theseus from the underworld after Hades punished Theseus for trying to abduct Persephone. Part of his punishment was to be stuck to a chair of rock.


Figure 35: The Heraklean Way, a speculative route that Herakles took on his return voyage home from Erytheia, which served as a vehicle for cultural, and therefore political, legitimacy.

Figure 36: Partially reconstructed image of the *elogia Tarquiniensia*, a series of three statues dedicated to three prominent members of the Spurinna family and found near the remains of the Ara della Regina temple in Tarquinia. This portion would have appeared under the figure of Velthur Spurinna, the patriarch who led the Etruscan forces in the 413 BCE invasion of Syracuse by Athenians.

Appendix A: Chronology of Contemporary Events

**ca. 750 BCE**  
Euboean settlers found colony at Cumae, the first Greek colony on the Italian mainland and the beginning of what would become Magna Graecia.

**ca. 700 – 400 BCE**  
Extensive trade and cultural exchange between Etruscans and Greeks through trade routes over the Tyrrhenian Sea.

**509 BCE**  
Founding of the Roman Republic marks the end of the Etruscan monarchy and the expulsion of Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome.

**431 BCE**  
Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta begins, consuming most of the Greek world. Tarquinia is sympathetic to the cause of Athens.

**415 – 413 BCE**  
Athens embarks upon a disastrous attempt to invade Sicily and subdue Syracuse. Tarquinia leads a contingent of Etruscan allies alongside Athenian forces.

**396 BCE**  
Conquest of Veii by Roman army under M. Furius Camillus begins a century of slow encroachment by Rome into central Italy.

**387 BCE**  
An army of Gauls under Brennus captures and sacks the city of Rome, dealing a major setback to Roman ambitions for territorial expansion.

**ca. 380 – 350 BCE**  
The Ara della Regina temple in Tarquinia, the largest in Etruria, undergoes major renovations and new construction on top of an older sixth century BCE sanctuary site.

**358 – 351 BCE**  
Etruscan hostilities against Rome in a series of wars foment a rebalancing of power among the cities of Etruria, with Veii and Caere newly under Roman domination.

**ca. 350 - 330 BCE**  
The Spurinna family likely begins construction of the Tomb of Orcus I in the necropolis outside of Tarquinia. The artistic attributes, and inscription of the title ‘zilath mechl rasnal’ meaning praetor Etruriae, support such a conclusion (M. Torelli, 1986).

**343 – 338 BCE**  
Rome fights a series of wars against the Samnites and Latins, consolidating its power in south-central Italy.

**323 BCE**  
The death of Alexander the Great marks the beginning of the Hellenistic era of Greek culture, including a renewed interest in the heroic past.
326 – 304 BCE Romans engage in the Second Samnite War, a series of battles to determine control over the areas between Rome and Naples. Eventually Rome subdues all of its enemies in that region and the hostile tribes sue for peace.

311 – 308 BCE Sensing an opportunity to attack Rome while it is engaged with the Samnites, an alliance of Etruscan cities, including Tarquinia, commence hostilities and attempt to regain their control over Etruria.

310– 308 BCE After a Roman victory at the Battle of Lake Vadimo, the Tarquinians conclude a separate, 40-year truce with the Romans, perhaps modeled after a previous 40-year truce agreed at the end of the hostilities that occurred in the middle of the fourth century BCE.

ca. 320 – 300 BCE The construction of the Tomb of Orcus II possibly takes place as Tarquinia experiences a brief resurgence in the final decades of the third century BCE. Orcus II is constructed and adjoined to the burial space of Orcus I by the destruction of the wall separating them.

295 BCE A major Roman victory against an allied Etruscan army at Sentinum divides the Etruscan cities and accelerates the progress of Rome’s complete domination of the lands of Etruria.

280 – 275 BCE King Pyrrhus of Epirus defeats Roman forces in the Battle of Heraclea in 280 BCE while attempting to maintain Magna Graecia’s Greek cultural influence and political autonomy from Rome. After the 275 BCE Battle of Beneventum, Pyrrhus leaves Italy and Roman domination of the peninsula is secure.
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