

Etruscan culture was a fusion. It mixed ethnicity and non-Indo-European language from Asia Minor with ancient Italian lines. People wore boots with turned-up toes like the Hittites and Hurrians. Their art was influenced by Crete, Phoenicians, Cypriots, and Greeks. Its paintings followed the Kemetic gendering convention, by way of Crete and Greece, of red-brown men and light-skinned women. Etruscan tombs included neo-megalithic elements related to Corsica and Sardinia. Temples had smooth painted columns modeled on Cretan and Mycenaean precedents, while other elements aligned with contemporary Greece and the extensive terracotta rooftop figures were unique to Etruria.



Classical Etruscan society was class-ranked, with aristocrats, not much of a middle class, and *etera* or *lautni*. These words are misleadingly translated as *servi* or *familiae*, Latin words for slaves. A better word would be *clientela*, since the *lautni* “had property rights” and could ascend socially, including marrying into the family. [Heurgon, 1959, 32-33] The difference between ladies and servants “is not always particularly marked” in early Etruscan art. [Haynes, 132] So there are marked differences with later Roman slavery.



Etruscan women, whether married or unmarried, were famously free. Sarcophagi display their aura of complete self-confidence, and the affection of their male partners. They who took part in public events, participated in councils and in nude athletics. The liberty of Etruscan women was notorious among the Greeks and Romans, who were scandalized at the liberty they enjoyed. Women socialized and drank at banquets with men, reclining with their chosen partners.

Greek men interpreted this as looseness, because of severe restraints on females in their own society. They projected absolute sexual license onto Etruscan women, in a pattern known as “topsy-turvy” world, in which Hellenes projected absolute reversals of their own social codes onto peoples they saw as Others. Women’s freedom horrified the writer Theopompos, who interpreted the Rasena through the patriarchal lens of his own society:

Sharing wives is an established Etruscan custom. Etruscan women take particular care of their bodies and exercise often, sometimes along with the men, and sometimes by themselves. It is not a disgrace for them to be seen naked. They do not share their [banquet] couches with their husbands but with the other men who happen to be present, and they propose toasts to anyone they choose. They are expert drinkers and very attractive. The Etruscans raise all the children that are born, without knowing who their fathers are. [Theopompos, *Histories* CLII, in Lefkowitz and Fant, 88-89]

Theopompos went on to fantasize that the Etruscan had public sex without any limitations. (His comment about women being “expert drinkers” draws a sharp contrast to Roman women who, according to tradition, were forbidden to drink wine, at least until the empire period.) This idea of licentious Etruscan women persisted among the Romans. Plautus had a character in one of his plays make this crack: “to earn a dowry the way the Etruscans do, by selling your body.” [*Cistellaria*, ii.3.20] He may well have been recycling the claim that Herodotus made about Lydian women. Some Roman writers, writing four centuries after the fact, portrayed powerful Etruscan women in an intensely negative light. They were the

opposite of properly modest females. Livy excoriated Tullia, wife of Tarquinius Superbus, blaming her for his crimes. But he praised the modest Lucretia, whose rape by the last king of Rome brought down the Tarquinian dynasty. [Glinister, 116]



For a more unbiased and authentic view of the Etruscans, we turn to archaeology. Women and men appear in relative gender parity, both represented in funerary ceramics and sarcophagi. In the Tomba delle Cinque Sede (Tomb of the Five Seats), ceramic ancestor icons of both sexes were placed on the stone thrones, with offering tables set before them. (See woman at left.) This early tomb is the earliest known portrayal of an Etruscan funerary banquet, and its distinctive portrayal of women and men “on equal terms.” [Haynes, 93]

The most famous example of this are the superb sculptured sarcophagi that show couples reclining together, affectionate and relaxed, the woman speaking and gesturing while the man placidly looks on. Murals also show women reclining, and dancing, amidst the men. They show female camaraderie and intimacy, notably in one painting that shows women who lay together, faces close as if kissing.



We see women pipers, ecstatic dancers, and women warriors. A bronze *skyphos* from the Barberini tomb shows a horsewoman, naked except for her belt or loincloth, preparing to hurl a weapon. [Brendel, 60] Amazons are a favorite theme, and Etruscan depictions often show them prevailing over male warriors. While men predominate numerically in classic Etruscan art, certain artifacts such as mirrors focus on female themes: “Women are conspicuously frequent, and often the centre of a story.” Even in Hellenic-themed pieces, heroines such as Helen shown unveiled, in contrast to Greek art, and female *lasas* replace the male Eros. [Brendel, 365]

Sian Lewis has emphasized that a large proportion of Greek export pottery was made for an Etruscan clientele and often catered to what women liked. These female-preferred scenes include paintings showing women outdoors. Lewis refers to an amphora in the Villa Giulia that shows seven women swimming and bathing in a forest lake, with their clothes hanging from the trees. [Lewis, 153] Few painted vases with such themes have been found in Greece itself.

“Scenes of courtship between men and women are common, with a far greater emphasis on equality between the sexes than in Greek iconography... One of the favorite themes of Etruscan mirrors is a divine woman courting a younger mortal lover, such as Thesau and Tinthan (Eos and Tithonos) or Turan and Atunis (Aphrodite and Adonis) and we may suppose that such themes were intended to appeal to women. In both Roman and Etruscan art, on mirrors and pottery, we see a concentration on the gentle and affectionate, rather than the orgiastic.” [Lewis, Shan, 150]



Sian Lewis also points out the salience of Amazons “as a noticeable theme” in the Greek painted vases found in Etruria. Amazons, are shown fighting and killing Greek soldiers or the hero Herakles. Nearly half of the scenes with Herakles show him facing Amazons. Unlike the amphorae found in Athens, these paintings don’t emphasize defeated Amazons: “the most regular pattern for the representation of Herakles and the Amazon offer a balanced composition of an Amazon killing a Greek, and vice versa, on either side of Herakles’ combat.” Other amphorae show marriage scenes on one side, and fighting Amazons on the other. [144-45] Something different is going on here.



There are other “anomalies” that diverge from the patriarchal standard. “There are indications that in certain regions and contexts Etruscan women were accorded particular importance. A striking example is

“the protective house-shaped sarcophagi encasing the funerary beds of women in the tombs of Cerveteri from the seventh to the fifth century.” [Haynes, 133] Jacques Heurgon wrote about this a half-century ago, and I found myself wondering about it, since more recent sources didn’t mention it. Yet this is not something that has been disproven; it has simply not been commented on.

ETRUSCAN MOTHER-RIGHT?

Ever since Bachofen, the question of Etruscan matrilineage has been argued, especially in the older sources. These tend to overstate the priority of the matronymic and of women in Etruscan culture overall. This has been a hard question to resolve, since many recent sources aren’t very clear about it. Many state that in funerary inscriptions the patronymic precedes the matronymic, but it is difficult to discern if this pattern also occurs in the earlier period, before Roman influence. In any case, the maternal line is often named, in contrast to Greek and Roman inscriptions. Some women are named with a husband’s surname added to their own. So the Etruscans did not privilege the motherline as some earlier sources suggested.

Isaac Taylor wrote in 1876: “We have seen that the paternal descent is in two instances omitted from the Etruscan record, but carefully recorded in the Latin version. In like manner the maternal descent is in

three instances omitted from the Latin version, but recorded in the Etruscan. ... There is no true Latin matronymic, but in four cases the Etruscan matronymic is translated by means of the Latin word *natus*.” Taylor shows the matronymic “with the suffix –al. In the case of married women, the place of the patronymic is often taken by the husband’s name with the suffix –isa.” But there also exist surnames in –ius, “an old genitive form, having a patronymic force.” [[255-56, 253]



The matronymic –al or –nal suffix is “uniformly represented in the bilinguals by the Latin word *natus*.” For example, Kainal equates to latinized Cainnia natus, Arntnal to Arria natus, and so on, meaning “born of (female name).” Taylor gives the example of Ath: Kupsna. Au. Knevial. This means, Ath whose father was Aule Kupsna and mother was from the Knevi lineage. She herself is inscribed as Larthi. Knevi. Kupsnasa. Knevi is her family name, and the final derives from her husband’s name. “It appears, therefore,

that –al was the Etruscan matronymic suffix.” It was used for both males and females. [220-1]

[Isaac Taylor, *Etruscan Researches*, 1874 http://books.google.com/books/about/Etruscan_researches.html; Robert Briffault states that the –al matronymic in Etruscan gave rise to the Latin verb *alere*, to bear. *The Mothers*, Vol. I, 425, n. 3]

In the mid-20th century, Ernst Pulgren described “the Etruscan custom of stating the mother’s name in the genitive in –al. In official Roman nomenclature neither this nor any other matronymic existed. The Etruscans, however, aligned themselves with the Roman custom, though not without some reluctance.” He gives a most interesting example of how this shift came about. An old-fashioned Etruscan grandfather retains his Manial matronymic but appends the Latin *natu*. His son substitutes an entirely Latin formulation for the matronymic, and his grandson omits it entirely. [184] This indicates a cultural drift to the more patriarchal Roman nomenclature. Pulgren also derives the Latin *filius*, “son,” from *felare*, to suckle. “Nevertheless, it has become quite independent of its etymology which was completely forgotten, so that in all [Latin] inscriptions *filius* goes with the patronymic and not with the matronymic.” [184-5]

Two present-day scholars describe Etruscan usage like this: “Etruscans also used along with the two names—the individual *praenomen* and the family *nomen*—the patronymic, the matronymic, and sometimes the names of the grandparents. Women sometimes used their husband’s name, the gamonymic. An individual was identified by the father’s and sometimes the mother’s name. The matronymic or mother’s name may appear by itself.... More frequently it appears together with the name of the father.”

[Bonfantes 2002, 89] However, this summary does not address the question of a possible historical shift: is there, as



Pulgren’s data suggests, a different pattern in the older inscriptions? The Bonfantes later comment that the instances where the matronymic appears by itself all apply to females: “Ten names of women appear as matronymics.” [180]

Like other scholars, the Bonfantès contrast the Etruscan status of women with the Latin: “In Rome free women, in contrast to the men, did not have their own, individual proper names.” Roman women used their father’s clan name with a feminine ending, and distinguished one daughter from another by calling them by birth order—Prima, Secunda, Tertia. [90] But their analysis of Etruscan inscriptions does show certain patriarchal patterns: “son” occurs in inscriptions more frequently than “daughter,” and “wife” has no male counterpart. “Since Etruscan society was patriarchal, we do not (yet) know the words for ‘husband,’ ‘uncle,’ ‘cousin,’ etc.” (You might wonder why “husband” would be missing from a patriarchal repertoire; they seem to be referring to the description of women in terms of male partners, but not vice versa.)

The patronym preceded the matronym in Etruscan funerary inscriptions, and the matronym gradually faded under Roman influence, disappearing around the 1st century bce. Burial patterns also indicate that married women were buried in their husbands’ family tombs as well, and “the majority of names preserved as those of men.” We know of many male titles of office: one-year-ruler (*lauchume/lucumo*), high priest, ruler, praetor, censor, haruspex and others. These appear to have only one named female counterpart, the *hatrencu*. [Haynes, 258, 133, 111]

WOMEN IN ETRUSCAN RELIGION

This brings us to the question of the Etruscan priestess, a subject about which little has been written. Some sources say there were none. Others are less categorical but point to a paucity of inscriptions or depictions of Etruscan priestesses. Lesley Lundeen remarks that while Etruscans were famously devoted to ritual and also well-known for the prominence of women, these two strands don’t seem to intersect. [Lundeen, find cite] DeGrummond and Simon agree that evidence for priestesses is scanty, but call attention to finds at the Tomba Bruschi: “A group of five impressive stone sarcophagi for women’s burials, also from Tarquinii... may well show a number of priestesses. No comparable male sarcophagi have been reported from the tomb.” [DeGrummond and Simon, 38] These female sarcophagi were ignored since their discovery in 1963, and were not displayed until a 2004 exhibit at Viterbo!

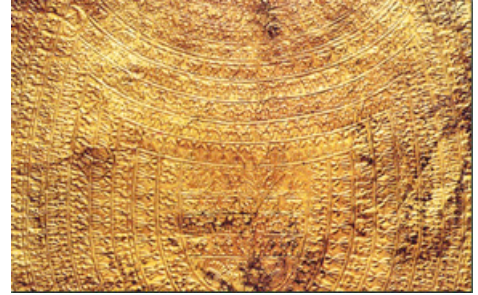
“Each of the women wears a tall hat of some kind, and the hair seems to be arranged in a ritual way, with six major locks on each side of the head (like the *seni crines* coiffure of Roman brides and of the Vestal Virgins).” The sculptured women are depicted in aristocratic clothes and jewelry. The objects they hold—two with *pateras* (ritual offering bowls), one with a *kantharos* cup, and one with a bird, have ritual significance. The same authors suggest that a female sarcophagus sculptured with a bacchante holding a fawn at Tarquinii, now in the British Museum, may be a priestess of Fufluns (Dionysos). [DeGrummond and Simon, 38] Jannot is dubious about this, but notes the “very unusual knot, which is so complicated that it seems, like the fibula of the haruspices, to obey a ritual clothing stipulation.” [Jannot, 129]



Early on in my research, I was struck by a mural of a woman consecrating offerings brought by a man and a boy piper in the Tomb of the Baron at Tarquinia. Susan Wood also interprets this mural as depicting a priestess. [Wood, 478] Otto Brendel comments on “the formal, almost ceremonial conduct” in this mural, which was painted directly on the cream-colored rock. [Brendel, 192] The woman’s hair is dressed in the tall *tutela* coiff covered by a white and then a red veil, intriguingly like the Roman priestess Flaminica Dialis. A stream of poppies ascends before her in a pattern

very reminiscent of the poppy garlands of goddesses in western Asia Minor: Artemis Ephesia, Hera of Samos, Atargatis of Syria.

And then there is the impressive female burial in the Regolini-Galassi tomb at Cerveteri, 650-625 bce. She is usually described as a queen, and in fact a throne was placed in her tomb along with hundreds of treasures, some imported. Her name was Larthia, engraved on five silver goblets, six cups and an amphora. Her torso was covered by a gigantic golden breastplate, elaborately chased with many rows of animals, palms, and winged divinities, many of them four-winged goddesses of Phoenician inspiration. Although Etruscan tombs were familial, not individual, this woman occupied the central chamber, with a cremated warrior in a side alcove and another man in the antechamber. His tomb furnishings were rich, but not inscribed with his name, and he had no glorious golden breastplate. [Heurgon, find cite] Only one other breastplate like Larthia's has ever been found, a smaller one dated several decades later. [von Bottmer, 268]

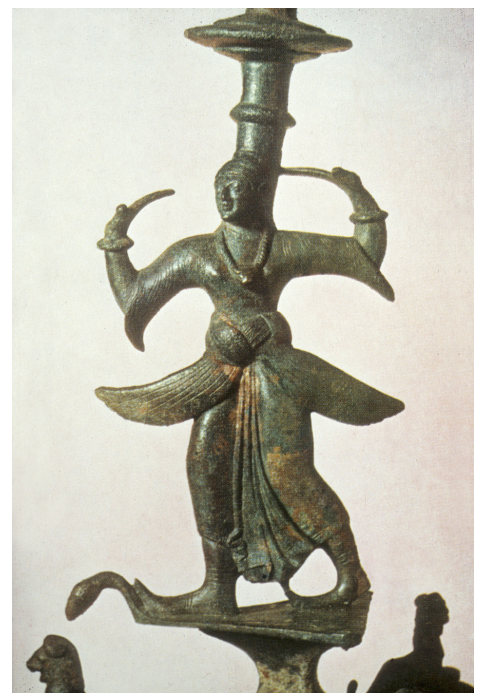


And the impressive throne, wood covered with bronze sheets fashioned with lions, griffins, hippocampus, and winged beings, was placed in Larthia's chamber. Her golden bracelets are figured with rows of women in ceremonial formation, holding palmate staffs. The Phoenician-styled finials depict a goddess (or priestess) grasping two of the same staffs, and flanked by rampant lions. Inscriptions on the Pyrgi tablets show that the Etruscans equated the Phoenician goddess 'Ashtart with their own great goddess Uni, and Ashtart was commonly depicted between two lions. [De Grummond 2010: 116] The religious symbolism of

the bracelets suggest a priestessly dimension to this queen.

Because of the strongly religious orientation of the Etruscan society—some even describe it as a theocracy—queens like Larthia were likely to possess prophetic and ceremonial authority. If the political power of Etruscan kings “was founded in part—probably in great part—on the knowledge of ritual,” what then of the queens? [Jannot, 4] This theme is most developed in the legend of the wise seeress Tanaquil, whose auguries were credited with bringing about the Etruscan dynasty that ruled Rome for seven generations. (More on Tanaquil below.)

The Etruscans spoke of an earlier, foundational prophetess, Vecu or Vecuia, later Vegoia. She was one of two legendary figures credited with revealing the Etrusca Disciplina, a cosmological, ritual and divinatory body of knowledge that governed the entire culture. Tradition called Vegoia originator of the *Libri Vegoici*, with its *Libri Fulgurales* (on lightning omens) and the *Libri Rituales*. These writings instructed Etruscans on the right way to found cities and sanctuaries, make laws, measure time and space, and care for the fields. The other foundational seer was Tages, a *puer senex* (“old child,” an exact equivalent of Lao Tzu.) He was born out of a plowed furrow. The

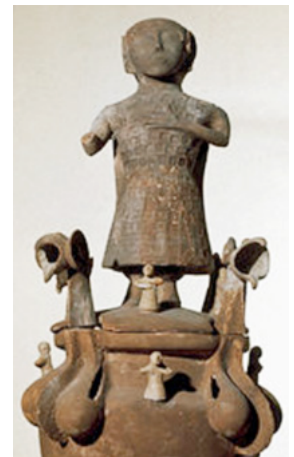


farmer cried out in alarm, a call to which all the Etruscan tribes came. [Jannot, 3] Then Tages sang out his teachings. These became the *Libri Tagetici*, which included the *Libri Haruspicini* (on divination) and the *Acherontici* (on Underworld beings).

Both of these founders of the Etruscan *Disciplina* are highly mythologized figures. Some described Vegoia as a “nymph,” others as “Muse.” Her tradition was based at Chiusi, while the story of Tages comes from Tarquinia. Her prophecies are linked with a sequence of ten *saeculae*, or ages, that defined the ordained span of Etruscan history. [Jannot, 5] Roman accounts say that Vegoia transmitted her revelations to Arruns Veltumnus, who wrote them down. Tages is depicted on bronze mirrors, while I have been unable to locate any images of Vecuia. Her prophesied end of the Etruscans as a people arrived on schedule as the last *saecula* passed in the first century bce. But the *Libri Vegoici* survived into Roman times, a *ius terrae Etruriae* (“law of Etruscan lands”) that was “kept together with the *Libri Sibyllini* in the temple to Apollo on the Palatine.” [Heurgon, 41]

So the most revered books of the very patriarchal Roman state harked back to two prophetic women, one Etruscan and the other Greco-Campanian, the Sibyl of Cumae. It’s worth recalling that Albunea, the original Tiburtine sibyl, was said to have been sculptured holding books, as certain Etruscan goddesses hold scrolls of fate. There is also Egeria, recorded as a transmitter of teachings to the Latin king Numa Pompilius and closely linked to veneration of Diana. And Nicostrata-Carmenta, the lawgiver whose teachings seem to have been primarily transmitted through chant.

Vecuia is presented as a founder of Etruscan culture, which would take us back to the Villanovan era. Priestesses are suggested by the invocational female figures around the lower portion of the Paolozzi urn, beneath the large portrait of the deceased woman (now an ancestor). There is abundant evidence of cultural change from the Villanovan period. Its bronzes “mostly represented women in the nude” in contrast with the following period. [Haynes, 132]



And then there are the *hatrencu*, known only from 4th and 3rd century inscriptions at Vulci. Twelve aristocratic women bear this title, which has been proposed as a designation for priestesses. Lesley Lundeen argues for *hatrencu* being a civic rather than religious title, an interpretation that passes over the apparent elision between these spheres in Etruscan culture (which she herself acknowledges). [Lundeen, 54] But she brings forward some significant information about the Tomb of the Inscriptions which had “two exclusively female [burial] chambers, both containing *hatrencu*...” [Lundeen, 51]

One of the women was Larthi Paniathi, a unique female *togate* (wearing a toga, normally a male garment)



She is sculptured with musicians at her side, and a wingless goddess Vanth, and has been interpreted as be a priestess or prophetess. Larthi belongs to a four-or-five-generation-long series of mother and daughter images, and “the only one not to list a husband’s name.” [Lundeen, 54] Lundeen seems reluctant to recognize any patterns of female authority, resorting instead to stereotyped femininity. She puts any prominence of Etruscan women up to “male absences” in war or trade. “Such male absences may also account for the strikingly female dominated Etruscan tombs, all dated to the 2nd and 1st centuries, the majority for the area of Perugia.” [56-7] The author then tries to extend *hatrencu* to “even an adjective referring to the deceased’s beauty or familial devotion.” She sees the term as “a civic title,” although conceding that it had religious and honorary aspects.

Her data shows that Etruscan women such as Ramza Murai “may have even founded new family tombs.” Lundeen comments, “This theory may explain exclusively female tombs like that of the Tomb of the Amazon Sarcophagus in which two seemingly unrelated women, Ramtha Muzcnai and Ramtha Zertnai, were buried.” [56, note 112] This most intriguing tomb juxtaposes a pair of women in an extra-familial or extramarital context with Amazon iconography, the mythic symbols of female self-determination. We may be looking at ancient lesbians in some of these burials.

The most striking link among these three Etruscan families is that all have female members designated as *hatrencu*. In two rooms, in fact, *hatrencu* belonging to different families are buried together in exclusively female chambers (Ramtha Prushlnai and Ramtha Zimarsai in Room IV; Ramtha Zimarui and Shethra Murai in Rome I). These groupings deviate strikingly from known Etruscan burial practices in two ways, namely the absence of male relatives and the joint burial of members of different clans. The unusual placement of these burials implies that these four *hatrencu* were unmarried and laid together because of their positions as *hatrencu*. [Lundeen, 42]

Many apparently unrelated women were buried together at this Tomb of the Inscriptions. [Lundeen, 43] Scholars have interpreted them as a religious association of women. Two women are depicted riding a two-wheeled carriage with parasol. One of them, Ramtha Visnai, is possibly a priestess. Others (Lundeen calls them servants) carry *cista*, *oinochoe*, fan, *situla*, and *kithara*, all with “ritual associations.” [Ibid, 44 (basket, special ceramic wine-vessel, fan, bronze wine vat, and stringed instrument)] The two-wheeled cart, whether chariot or *carpentum*, seems to have special ceremonial meanings when driven by women, as highlighted by Fay Glinister. [“Women and Power in Archaic Rome.” in *Gender and Ethnicity in Ancient Italy*. Accordia Specialist Studies on Italy. Vol 6, 1997]

Other *hatrencu*, such as Ramtha Vishnei in Room V and Ramtha Murai in Room VI, were buried with men “presumably their husbands and sons.” “Finally, in Room I, we find two *hatrencu*, a second Ramtha Zimarui and a Shethra Murai, buried along a Ramza Murai” who she says was not a *hatrencu* but “may have been the secondary tomb founder...” [42] The constant recurrence of this name (or title) of Ramtha/Raza is quite salient. It is the name of most of these *hatrencu* (or *hatrencu*-associated) women. “The particularly high status of elite women at Vulci is clear... from the sarcophagi of Ramtha Vishnai and of Larth Tetnies and Thancvil Tarnies, the three women depicted on the Copenhagen sarcophagus, and the *hatrencu*, who appear only at Vulci.” [58] Lundeen concludes, “If the Etruscan priestess existed, she’s not to be found in the literary record.”

However, the archaeology is more suggestive. De Grummond and Simon propose that the *hatrencu* women of Vulci’s Tomb of the Inscriptions may be connected, as priestesses who are buried together, with the five tall-headdressed women sculptured on sarcophagi at Tarquinii. [De Grummond and Simon, 39] Sybille Haynes, too, speaks of a “collegial link” between the *hatrencu*. She agrees with scholars who interpret them as a female college based on motherhood and family, along the lines of the Roman Mater Matuta. [Haynes, 286]

Lundeen does point to a probable female diviner from the late Archaic Etruscan period in a Paris museum, similar to the male haruspex statues, but with breasts. She also mentions female haruspices on 3rd century mirrors. One named as Ucerni is shown standing beside a famous male priest who is performing haruspicy. [Lundeen, 36] Other tidbits exist, like the appellation of *nethsra* for a female diviner. This attested name is directly related to *zich nethsrac*, the art of divination. However, male

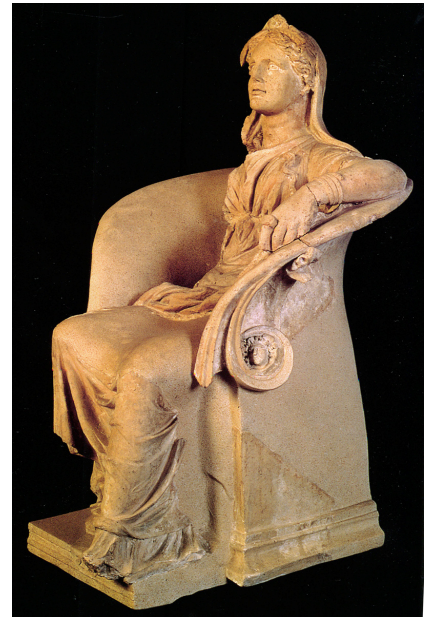


haruspices, as readers of the livers of sacrificed animals, overshadow *nethsra* in the written and iconographic record.

Certain women, notably Tanaquil, were remembered as skilled interpreters of omens and auguries. They did not divine from livers, but from the flight of birds, from hearth fires and, if we go back to Vecuia's origination of the *Libri Fugurales*, divination from thunder. Women's readings of omens may well have predated divination from sacrificial livers, a custom of Mesopotamian origin, in Etruria. Vecuia was also credited with assigning meanings to sectors in the heavens, and corresponding sacred divisions on land. [Jannot, 25] In other words, she laid down the foundations of the *Disciplina Etrusca*.

TANAQUIL

The Etruscan princess Tanaquil attained lasting fame as a woman "well skilled in celestial prophecies." [Livy 1.34.9; Dionysos of Halicarnassus Ant. Rom. 4.3.2] Because her husband Tarquin was an immigrant from Corinth, he could not advance in aristocratic Etruscan society. Tanaquil encouraged him to seek better fortune in the town of Rome. As they drove there, so legend says, an eagle swooped down and flew off with her husband's cap, then wheeled around and dropped it back on his head. Tanaquil read this as an omen foretelling Tarquin's rise to the Roman throne. He became the fifth king, founding the Tarquinian dynasty around 616-579 bce.



As with the previous kings of Rome, it was not the son of Tarquin and Tanaquil who became the sixth king. Instead it was the husband of their daughter Tarquinia: Servius Tullius. Roman writers struggled to account for how Servius, an ex-slave, could become king of Rome. Livy refused to believe that such an eminent man could be of low birth, claiming that he was born of the captive princess Ocrisia, already pregnant and recognized for her rank. Other accounts spoke of omens that caused Tanaquil to elevate her. The slave Ocrisia saw a phallus (actually a *fascinum*, "magical object") come out of the hearth fire. Hearing this, her mistress Tanaquil instructed her to dress as a bride and sit on the hearth. In this way Ocrisia conceived Servius, in a common pagan tale of conception-by-spirit. Of course, the realities of the conditions enslaved women lived under tell a very different story.

Tanaquil raised the child as a prince as a result of another momentous portent: his hair was seen in flames while he slept. The sage queen prevented water from being thrown on him, and the fire went out when he awoke. She foretold his future greatness and convinced the king to honor him. Ovid, Plutarch and Dionysos of Halicarnassus all tell this story. Another version of it was told of the conception of Romulus and Remus. In an even more distant, Irish version, the infant Brigid exuded flames from her head while sleeping.

So Servius Tullius married Tanaquil's daughter, which put him in the matriline for kingship. When assassins attacked Tarquinius, the queen acted decisively. She cleared the palace and hid her husband's fatal condition. According to Livy, she addressed the people from a palace window, reassuring them and telling them it was the king's will that Servius act as in his place until he recovered. Thus she installed her own choice as king over her son Lucius. [Livy 1.47]

Roman scholar Fay Glinister points to the king-maker role of Etruscan women like Tanaquil and Tullia. Noting that there were no Roman queens who ruled in their own right, she writes, "Women could only

realize their ambitions or have any authority in conjunction with an assenting male relative.” Tanaquil may have chosen Servius to rule over her own son because, as a man who owed his social ascent to her, he would be a means of extending her own power. [Glinister, 1997: 119] Or perhaps she felt that Servius really was the better choice, and that her son would be a bad ruler. Tanaquil invested Servius with a royal robe that she had woven with an undulating pattern. [Pliny, find]

The patrician historian Livy complained that Servius favored commoners: “His sympathies were with the dregs of society from which he had sprung.” [Livy, *History of Rome*, I, 47: www.romansonline.com/sources/hor/Lv01_47.asp] It was this slave-king elevated by a woman who founded the ancient temple of Diana on the Aventine around 540 BCE, and who built the temples of Fortuna and Mater Matuta. Slaves continued to celebrate the festivals of both Diana and Fortuna in later centuries. [Varro, in Ogilvie, 65, 69] Servius Tullius offered the robes woven by Tanaquil to the statue of Fortuna in Rome. According to Pliny, they hung there for 560 years without decaying.

Many would say that the Tanaquil tradition is myth, not history. Clearly it contains mythic elements, but Glinister points out that the basic narrative of archaic Rome “is remarkably coherent and unitary.” She thinks that this received tradition of the Tarquinian dynasty women “reflects the survival of authentic archaic data.” [Glinister, 116]

Romans later deified their legendary Etruscan queen under the Latin name Caia (or Gaia) Caecilia. (Festus says this is the name she took when she arrived in Rome, but most historians think this is a later invention.) Her bronze statue holding a distaff and spindle loaded with wool stood in the ancient temple of Sancus, along with her sandals. [Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 8.74] Her distaff had magical qualities, and scrapings from the amulets (*praestia*) on her girdle were regarded as potent protective talismans. [Festus, *De verborum significationem*, 276L]



Gaia Caecilia was associated with spinning and weaving, like a good Etruscan and Roman wife. Her prophetic power and conjugal equality were eclipsed by her wool-working in invocations of her in marriage ceremonies. She became the prototype of the dutiful Roman bride, who said to her husband, “Where you are Gaius, I am Gaia.” Karen Hersch comments that “...Tanaquil’s presence in the Roman wedding ceremony recalls neither the equal partnership she shared with Lucumo nor skill in augury, but rather is distilled into a description of her skills in wool-working.” [Hersch, 138]

FALL OF THE ETRUSCANS

The Greeks gradually pushed the Etruscan border back toward the north. Rome expelled its last Etruscan king in 510, and a century later began capturing towns in Etruria. As they colonized the country, its cultural influence remained colossal. Many Roman clans were known to be of Etruscan origin, including the Julii that Caesar came from. They adopted the *fascis* symbol (birch rods wrapped around an axe) and many Etruscan deities, notably the Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva (Tinia, Uni, Menrva). Likewise Nethuns shifted to Neptunus, Maris to Mars, Velchans to Vulcanus. Romans used Etruscan technologies of stone-working, architecture, hydraulics and engineering, and their letters were derived from the alphabet as it was used in Etruria. Where the Romans differed most dramatically was in the

status of women, with one exception that possibly goes back to Etruscan influence: women's right to inherit.

This article, written in 2011, will be fleshed out in Vol IV of *Secret History of the Witches*. See <https://www.suppressedhistories.net/secrethistory/contents.html> for descriptions of all its volumes. Vol VII, *Witches and Pagans: Women in European Folk Religion, 700-1100*, is the first of these to be published, and is available here: <http://www.veleda.net/>

Graphics in order of appearance:

Etruscan man in Kemetic coloration, Tomb of the Lionesses

Sposati /Couple, now in the Villa Giulia Museum in Rome

Ancestral woman icon from Tomba delle Cinque Sedie

Women together, Etruscan painted amphora

Turan with her younger lover Atuns (Aphrodite and Adonis), mirror

Joyous and rambunctious Amazons, chased silver

Dancers on side of Etruscan sarcophagus

Dancers from a tomb in Tarquinia, southern Etruria

Priestess, Tomb of the Baron, Tarquinia

Detail of the necklace of queen Larthia, Regolini-Galassi tomb

Bracelet of queen Larthia, Regolini-Galassi tomb

Bronze censer or candelabra with dancing woman

Paolozzi urn, Villanovan (proto-Etruscan) period

Larthia Paniathi wearing toga, with musicians

Dancer from Tomb of the Lionesses

Etruscan woman in terracotta from Ariccia (Nemi)

Woman's head from mural in Tomb of Orcus, Tarquinia