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## **Analecta Praehistorica Leidensia 43-44 / The End of our Fifth Decade**

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### **Citation**

Bakels, C., Kamermans, H., & Et al.,. (2012). Analecta Praehistorica Leidensia 43-44 / The End of our Fifth Decade, 386. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/32927>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)  
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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# ANALECTA PRAEHISTORICA LEIDENSIA

43/44

PUBLICATION OF THE FACULTY OF ARCHAEOLOGY  
LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

THE END OF OUR FIFTH DECADE

EDITED BY  
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LEIDEN UNIVERSITY 2012

Series editors: Corrie Bakels / Hans Kamermans

Editor of illustrations: Joanne Porck

Copy and language editor: Kelly Fennema

ISSN 0169-7447

ISBN 978-90-000000-0-0

Subscriptions to the series *Analecta Praehistorica Leidensia*  
and single volumes can be ordered at:

<http://archaeology.leiden.edu/organisation/publications/analecta-praehistorica-leidensia/>

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# Adonis: a Greek ritual and myth in the Etruscan world

L. Bouke van der Meer

*Ritual places in and engraved mirrors from Etruria testify to transformations of the Greek Adonis ritual and myth. The mirror images show interest in erotic meetings, mothering, domesticity, identification, fate, and ritualization.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

According to archaeological theorists it is difficult to reconstruct what ancient people thought, especially when literary sources are missing. The following is an attempt to trace mentalities by studying artefacts, many without precise contexts, e.g. find-spot, production centre, workshop, patrons, craftsmen, donors, buyers, and users (for the problems see Serra Ridgway 2000).

Adonis, *Atunis* in Etruscan, was a popular subject in Etruria from c. 500 BC until Augustus's reign. Why? How were his originally Greek rituals, myth and images transmitted, adopted and adapted? Did Etruscans understand and transform them? What about their function and meaning(s)? Are the images polysemantic?

Several events from the myth are visible on the inscribed, engraved reverses of 22 Etruscan bronze mirrors. They can be dated between c. 410/400 and 280 BC (tables 1 and 2). Until now c. 3000 mirrors are known. They were first used mostly by women in daily life (pace Izzet 2007), and later, sometimes much later, deposited in tombs. Around 1500 mirrors have engraved images on the back. More than 300 are inscribed and carry names of mythological figures. After *Hercle* (Heracles), who is depicted around 50 times, *Atunis* is the favourite male 'hero.' All mirrors bearing images of *Atunis* are circular tang mirrors, the usual type in the fourth century BC. The diameters vary from 13.4 to 19.8 cm.

Extensions and tangs, images and border decorations are all different. This means that the engravers of *Atunis* mirrors were very creative, and probably did not copy images from other mirrors.

First some words about the Adonis myth and the oldest material indications of Adonis rituals in Etruria.

## 2 THE MYTH

Adonis, the beautiful young lover of Aphrodite, was popular in Etruria from c. 500 BC until the reign of Augustus. The Greek Adonis myth is certainly of oriental origin:

the name is derived from the Semitic word (Adon), which means 'Lord' (Detienne 1972; Bremmer 1987; Atallah 1996).

Traces of the oriental origins of the myth can be found in the literary sources.

Apollodorus (*Library* 3.14.3-4), who wrote in the second century AD (but quoted far older authors), after having mentioned Cinyras, founder of Paphos in Cyprus, as father of Adonis, tells the following story:

'And Adonis, while still a boy (Greek *pais*), was wounded and killed by a boar while hunting, through the anger of Artemis. Hesiod, however, affirms that he was a son of Phoenix and Alpheisiboea; and Panyasis says that he was a son of Thias, king of Assyria, who had a daughter Smyrna. In consequence of the wrath of Aphrodite, for she did not honour the goddess, this Smyrna conceived a passion for her father, and with the complicity of her nurse she shared her father's bed without his knowledge for twelve nights. But when he was aware of it, he drew his sword and pursued her, and being overtaken she prayed to the gods that she might be invisible; so the gods in compassion turned her into the tree which they call *smyrna* (myrrh). Ten months afterwards the tree burst and Adonis, as he is called, was born, whom for the sake of his beauty, while he was still an infant (Greek *nèpios*), Aphrodite hid in a chest unknown to the gods and entrusted to Persephone. But when Persephone beheld him, she would not give him back. The case being tried before Zeus, the year was divided into three parts, and the god ordained that Adonis should stay by himself for one part of the year, with Persephone for one part, and with Aphrodite for the remainder. However Adonis made over to Aphrodite his own share in addition; but afterwards in hunting he was gored and killed by a boar' (translation by Sir James G. Frazer, Loeb Classical Library 1939).

Apollodorus situates the myth in Cyprus, Phoenicia or Assyria. According to the late author Photius (*Lexicon* s.v. Adonia), the Adonis ritual came to Greece via Cyprus and Phoenicia. Adonis can be compared to the Semitic young herdsman Tammuz, lover of Ishtar. Tammuz was also killed by a boar, and women wept over him (*Ezechiel* 8, 14-15) each year, in the summer. There are strong indications that the wailing took place on sanctuary terraces and house roofs (Di Filippo Balestrazzi 1999). As for the myrrh of the

	<b>H. Rix, <i>ET</i></b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Findspot</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Diameter</b>
1.	<i>ET</i> Ta S. 5	<i>ES</i> 5, 25	Tarquinia	350-325	18.0
2.	<i>ET</i> Ta S. 6	<i>ES</i> 5, 28 <i>CSE</i> DDR 1, 31	Tarquinia	350-300	14.5
3.	<i>ET</i> Ta S. 9	<i>ES</i> 5, 27	Tarquinia	c. 350	18.5
4.	<i>ET</i> AT S. 7	<i>ES</i> 5, 23	Castel d'Asso	325-300	19.2
5.	<i>ET</i> Vs S. 8	<i>ES</i> 1, 115	Montefiascone	c. 350	17.0
6.	<i>ET</i> Vs S. 10	<i>ES</i> 5, 26	Bolsena	350-325	14.9
7.	<i>ET</i> Vc S. 14	Amorelli 1952, 191	Montalto di Castro	c. 400	16.0
8.	<i>ET</i> Cl S. 11	<i>MAL</i> 30, 542	Marcianella	325-300	18.0
9.	<i>ET</i> Pe S. 10	Rallo 27, 6	Perugia	350-325	16.5
10.	<i>ET</i> Pe S. 11	<i>ES</i> 5, 24; <i>CSE</i> Italia 2, 1, 4	Perugia	c. 350	16.5
11.	<i>ET</i> Ar S. 3	<i>ES</i> 1, 50, 2	Castiglion Fiorentino	320-280	14.0
12.	<i>ET</i> OI S. 15	<i>ES</i> 1, 116 <i>CSE</i> BRD 4, 34		400-350	15.9
13.	<i>ET</i> OI S. 34	<i>ES</i> 1, 111 <i>CSE</i> BRD 4, 33		350-325	17.2
14.	<i>ET</i> OI S. 44	Cahn 1970, 13, no. 20		325-300	16.0
15.	<i>ET</i> OI S. 45	<i>ES</i> 4, 1, 322		350-300	19.5
16.	<i>ET</i> OI S. 51	Charsekin 79, no. 15 (lost)		350-325	?
17.	<i>ET</i> OI S. 71	<i>CSE</i> BRD 1, 39		350-300	18.2
18.	<i>ET</i> OB S. 3	<i>ES</i> 1, 114		400-350	13.4
19.		Briquel 2010, 6, fig. 2		c. 350	17.0
20.		Feruglio 1997, 299-314	Caldane di Castel Viscardo	400-350	16.3
21.		<i>CSE</i> Schweiz 1, 5		350-300	13.8
22.		<i>CSE</i> Schweiz 1, 36		350-325	18.0
23.	<i>ET</i> Pe S. 12	<i>ES</i> 2, 176	Perugia	350-325	19.8
24.	<i>ET</i> AH 3.3	<i>ES</i> 1, 112; 5, 191	Bisenzio (not Bomarzo)	350-325	17.9
25.		<i>CSE</i> France 1, 3, 7	Orbetello	400-350	16.8

Table 1 Epigraphic mirrors showing and mentioning *Atunis* (except damaged no. 23 with lost name and nos 24 and 25 without his name).

balm-tree, this substance was exported from the Semitic to the Greek world in the seventh century BC. Hesiod and Sappho who mention Adonis lived in the same time.

### 3 THE RITUAL

The oldest traces of a ritual in honour of Adonis in Etruria were found in the commercial sanctuary of Gravisca, harbour place of Tarquinia, once visited by Greeks and Etruscans (Torelli 1997; Fiorini 2008; Fiorini and Torelli 2010). The sanctuary developed gradually since c. 600 BC. It had rooms dedicated to Aphrodite (in Etruscan *Turan*), Adonis, Hera

(*Uni*) and Demeter (*Veī*) (fig. 1). The sacred space for Adonis (δ) is connected to the room of Aphrodite/Turan (γ), where a number of finds and an inscription suggest that sacred prostitution took place. Adonis' space contains a paved square and a garden, an empty stone sarcophagus in a stone enclosure in the square, a water-well, two altars, a portico and a tower. To the finds in situ belong a reversed, half ceramic amphora and an Arretine shard bearing a Latin inscription reading *Adon*, dated to the time of Augustus. The building date of Adonis' space (c. 500 BC) can be explained by the fact that Adonis festivals at Athens became gradually popular in the fifth century BC.

1. *axvizr atunis θalna* (Achvizr holding *alabastron*, nude A. (with *bulla*) and semi-nude Turan embracing, standing in front of bed, winged Thalna carrying wreath)
2. *evan atunis mean* (Evan holding twigs seated on rocks, bird carrying necklace or armlet with 3 *bullae*, semi-nude A. alone holding twig, Mean holding *alabastron* and dipstick, seated on rocks)
3. *atunis turan* (standing semi-dressed, bearded A. with sceptre and sitting, dressed T. in conversation)
4. *lasa turan atuns menrva amuce* (winged nude *Lasa* carrying hanger with flower, Apollo holding laurel, semi-nude T. and A. standing and embracing, united by ribbon, armed *Menrva* dancing, fountain labelled *Amuce*)
5. *atunis turan lasa sitmica /arm aθ ac l a rn l a* (seated semi-nude A. with knotty stick and standing dressed T. holding twig in conversation, *cista*, and *Lasa Sitmica* holding staff)
6. *atunis turan* (A. playing lyre and T., both almost nude, their legs intertwined, sitting on bed)
7. *atunis turan* (semi-nude A. with knotty stick and dressed T. offering flower, both standing)
8. *umaele eturpa atunis inue eθial erax alpunea / urpe* (oracle of *Urphe*/Orpheus; nude A. and Turan lying and facing in upper exergue)
9. *atunis lasa axununa* (swan, dog, seated semi-nude A. and dancing, almost nude, winged *Lasa* (instead of T.) embracing, in the open air)
10. *lasa turan atunis* (rosette-like stars, *Lasa*, dressed T. and nude A. (with *bulla*), standing and embracing, in the open air)
11. *atun(is) turan* (standing semi-nude A. with spear, nude T. dancing, holding twig, in the open air)
12. *atunis turan ati* (nude tree, nude winged A. and sitting dressed T. *Ati* (Mother) together playing with a bird (dove?), *cista*, mirror)
13. *pulθisφ atunis turan snenaθ* (semi-nude Apollo Thespis holding lyre and plectrum, swan, semi-nude A. and dressed T. (giving egg or ring to *Snenath*) standing and embracing, *Snenath* holding *alabastron* and dipstick)
14. *turan atunis* (sitting semi-nude T. and standing nude winged A. embracing, small man (with laurels on his head) holding lyre, swan, in the open air)
15. *tusna atunis turan zipna / alpan axvizr munθχ mean (munθ?)ux / haθna* (swan *Tusna*, semi-nude A. (with 2 *bullae*) and dressed T. standing and embracing, winged dressed *Zipna* holding *alabastron* and dipstick; surrounded by two rows of three hovering winged personifications: *Alpan*, *Achvizr*, *Munthch*, *Mean*, *Munthuch* (?) and a Muse with lyre (unlabelled); satyr *Hathna* emptying an amphora for two panthers)
16. *turan atunis munθχ* (lost mirror)
17. *atunis turan ta(ln)a z(iu)mit(e)* (nude man, bird, nude A. (with 3 *bullae*) embracing sitting dressed T., *Talna* holding sceptre, *Ziumite* (*Diomedes*) holding spear)
18. *turan atuniś* (bird, laurel, semi-nude A. offering flower to dressed T. sitting on her knees, both sitting on bed and embracing, laurel)
19. *munθχ turan atunis turnu* (*Munthch* holding double oboe, swan, dressed A. (with *bulla*) sitting on lap of sitting, dressed T. (head covered), embracing, male *Turnu* holding lyre)
20. *turnu apulu turan atunis* (inscr. in cartouches; winged nude male *Turnu* using *rhombos*, standing Apollo holding laurel branch, standing dressed T. holding *rhombos*, embracing nude A. (with *bulla*) from behind, bird (*inyx*))
21. *turan atunis* (branch on rock, nude T. (with *bulla*) and nude A. standing and embracing, under a common mantle, branch, in the open air)
22. *turan atunis* (standing dressed T. and dressed A. in conversation, swan)
23. *[atunis] tu[ran] aθrpa meliacr atlenta* (nude *Atunis* (?) embraced by dressed T., *Athpra* (Greek *Atropos*) handling hammer and nail, boar head, *Meliacr* (*Meleagros*) and *Atlenta* (*Atalanta*), both armed)
24. *tite cale : atial : turce / malstria : cver* (sitting dressed woman with sceptre, dressed T. (?) and nude A. (?) standing and embracing, standing *Menerva* with inscribed shield: *tite cale* etc., in the open air)
25. *venos diovem prosepnai* (*Venus* covering her face, *Jupiter* holding thunderbolt, turned and pointing to *Prosepnai*; *Prosepnai* holding twig and pointing to the closed chest)

Table 2 Atunis mirrors (numbered as above).

Inscriptions and in brackets from left to right persons, attributes and motifs.

A. = Atunis; T. = Turan.

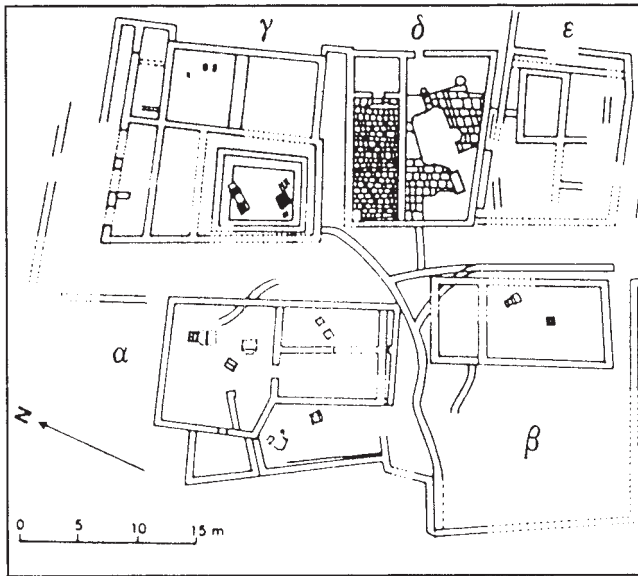


Figure 1 Greek-Etruscan sanctuary at Gravisca (from *Santuari* 1985).

The ritual in Gravisca was probably similar to a private ritual in Athens, probably organized during the hot dog days in July. In Athens women carried broken halves of amphoras, turned upside down, filled with germinating, an-aphrodisiac corn-salads (lettuce) and fennels (called *kèpoi*: ‘gardens’), climbing wooden stairs to the roof of their house; in Gravisca the ‘gardens’ were probably brought up to the roof of the portico. The Athenian *modus operandi* can be seen on ten Attic red figure vases (c. 450-350 BC; Weill 1966; Servais-Soyez 1981, 227-228). They show a woman, semi-nude or dressed, mounting or descending wooden stairs, carrying the broken half of an amphora or plate with tiny vegetables and/or fruits inside. The general atmosphere of the scenes is serious, and not as lascivious as ancient authors such as Aristophanes (413 BC) suggest.

What further happened in Gravisca is virtually unknown. The empty sarcophagus found may have contained a statue of Adonis, which may have been exhibited and then buried again during the ritual. Torelli’s attempt (1997) to reconstruct the whole ritual is problematic, since it is based on information from authors like Theocritus (*Idyll* XV), who describes an Adonis feast at the palace in Alexandria around 280-270 BC. It is dangerous to extrapolate the Alexandrian praxis two centuries back. The sarcophagus is oriented east-north-east, curiously not in line with the long axis of the sacred space δ (fig. 1). This can be explained by the fact that the sun rises there at the end of July. In Etruscan cosmology the place of sunrise, during the solstices and equinoxes, was of fundamental importance (Stevens 2009). The remarkable orientation shows that the Greek ritual had become Etruscanized.

The sanctuary at Gravisca was used until 281 BC, when Romans destroyed it. Adonis’ space, however, was used again in the Augustan period, which may mean that the ritual continued after the destruction.

A ritual similar to that of Adonis may also have been practised at Pyrgi, a harbour of Caere (Cerveteri). Temple B, dedicated to *Uni* (Iuno)/Astarte in the northern area, yielded three golden tablets, one with a Phoenician and two with Etruscan inscriptions, dated to c. 500 BC (*Santuari* 1985; Maras 2009, 349-354). The Phoenician text tells us that Astarte gave permission to Thefarie Velianas, king of Caere, to reign for three years, “in the month of *krr*, on the day of the funeral of the deity.” The latter deity, of course, was Tammuz. The ritual may have been performed as a symbolic, sacred marriage between goddess and king, who in Etruscan was given his Republican title: *zilac-zilath* (cf. Latin *praetor*). Both Gravisca and Pyrgi may have had in common a ritual in which Tammuz/Adonis was symbolically buried, e.g. by burying a statue of him in a tomb. At Pyrgi this probably took place in zone C, the annex of temple B, which was oriented north-east.

In addition, sacred prostitution may have occurred in both places. Some of the terracotta antefixes which probably decorated the twenty sacred love rooms show a repeating cosmic cycle of light and night deities with an oriental character (Krauskopf 1991, 1261-1283).

Ritual elements like tomb, pots or stairs are not visible on Etruscan mirrors.

#### 4 RECEPTION OF THE MYTH

An archaeological context sheds light on the reception of the Adonis myth. Dated to the end of the fifth century BC are the grave goods of a woman at Populonia (Piombino), including two splendid Attic red figure *hydriai* of the Meidias Painter. One shows *Adonios* (labelled) sitting in the lap of Aphrodite (fig. 2), the other *Phaon* (labelled), another beautiful man (Burn 1987, 40-44). The latter transported for nothing an old ugly woman, who appeared to be Aphrodite herself in disguise. For that reason the goddess gave him a perfume which transformed him into an irresistible, eternally young lover. Since the vases show two beautiful men in a similar way, they must have been special commissions. The owner was interested in erotic scenes since one of the other grave goods is an Etruscan bronze mirror showing a satyr lifting the dress of a woman reclining on a bed (Romualdi 2000).

In both scenes the main persons are surrounded by personifications. One of them is called *Pannychis*, All-Night Festival. On the Adonis-*hydria*, *Himeros* (Desire) handles a magic wheel (*rhombos*; *inyx*), and *Eury noe* (Broad Mind) plays with a wryneck (*inyx*; *iunx torquilla*), a magic bird that could look dead when caught but was still alive. According to Pindar (*Pythian* 4, 214-219) it could make people madly in love.





Figure 2 Hydria of the Meidias painter, drawing (from Burn 1987).

## 5 TRANSMISSION

The magical elements just mentioned are also present in images of *Atunis* (see table 2, no. 20; c. 400-350 BC; fig. 3) and of *Phaun/Faun* (Greek Phaon) on mirrors of the fourth century BC. In addition, three Phaon mirrors have personifications with a name beginning with *Eu-*, which remind us of personifications like Eutychia on Meidias vases (Cristofani 1986; Donatella Gentili 2000, 115-141). It is unlikely that mirror engravers copied directly from these two Attic vases. No *Atunis* mirrors have been found in the region of Populonia. Greek images may have been transferred by textiles and other models.

Mirror no. 18 (c. 400-350 BC), which was engraved by an artisan from Northern Etruria in view of the typical letter *san* (M = ś), shows *Atuniś* (written *dextrorsus*), with a hairstyle in the manner of the Meidias Painter.

Mirror no. 20, found in a robbed *fossa* tomb, shows an embrace similar to that on another mirror found at Vulci of the same form, composition and style, which shows Apollo, holding a laurel, and *Fufluns* (Dionysos) embraced from behind by his mother *Semla* (Greek Semele) (ES 1, pl. 83). The scene depicts Dionysos, who has just brought his mother out of the Underworld and taken her up to Apollo's

sanctuary in Delphi. As Feruglio (1997) points out, the engraver of both mirrors used an exchangeable scheme. Since *Apulu* on no. 20 has no clear function, the *Fufluns-Semla* scheme is older. It has a precedent in a relief of the throne of Zeus at Olympia, made by Pheidias of Athens, showing Niobe embracing one of her dying sons from behind. So the origin of the composition again originates from Athens. The two mirrors were produced in Vulci, but the *Atunis* mirror was used near Orvieto, which proves the high mobility of mirrors.

Though the presence of *rhombos* and *inyx* on no. 20 shows the influence of the Meidias painter, the presence of an *alabastron* (perfume flask of alabaster) and dipstick, isolated and therefore represented as symbols, is typically Etruscan. Perfume is used for seduction (nos. 1, 2, 5, 13, 15, and 20). The use of music (nos. 6, 13, 14, 15, and 19), however, is of Attic origin as the *hydriai* of the Meidias Painter show.

Another early mirror (no. 7), dated to c. 400 BC, shows *Atunis* and *Turan* in a way that, as Amorelli (1952) points out, is reminiscent of classical Attic grave reliefs. It is another indication that motifs from Athens were transferred to Etruria. The mirror was found at Montalto di Castro, a coastal settlement near Vulci, where many mirrors with an





Figure 3 Mirror no. 20 from Castel Viscardo (from Feruglio 1997).

ivy-leaf border decoration were produced in the fifth and fourth centuries BC.

From another coastal metropolis, Tarquinia, comes mirror no. 3 (c. 350 BC). It is piriform, has a tang handle, and laurel branches as border decoration. The shape is characteristic of mirrors made at Praeneste (in Latium) before c. 350 BC. Later the mirrors had massive handles cast in one piece with the disc, and Latin instead of Etruscan inscriptions.

It seems likely that the myth entered Etruria via the Tyrrhenian coastal sites of Gravisca, Tarquinia, Pyrgi, Vulci, and Populonia. Athens offered schemes, style and motifs.

Mirror no. 25, from Orbetello (c. 400-350 BC), shows the Judgement of Jupiter. Though it has Latin inscriptions, there is Etruscan influence since the name *Prosepnai* (cf. Latin Proserpina) is influenced by Etruscan *Phersipnai* (cf. Greek Persephone). The name *Diovem*, accusative of Jupiter, points to an oral transmission of the myth.

## 6 THE QUESTION OF CHOICE

Some mirror images show Turan and Atunis in conversation or embracing, usually in the open air, standing or sitting

together or with one of them sitting alone on a rock, chair, stool or bed. The primary meaning must have been simple: love between a goddess and a young mortal man. Other images, however, must have been chosen from different perspectives, which are dealt with below.

One of the earliest mirrors (no. 7; c. 400 BC) shows the couple without onlookers. This may mean that it was in the course of the fourth century, often after c. 350 BC, that many scenes were enriched with typically Etruscan minor deities and personifications, belonging to the circle of Turan (Lasa, Achvisr, Munth(u)ch, T(h)alna (probably meaning 'young'), Turnu (from the adj. \**Turan-u*: 'belonging to Turan'), and with attributes (Turan's swan, a *cista* (box), mirror, *alabastron*, musical instruments). Some mirrors after c. 350 BC show a border of floral scrolls (nos. 2, 6, 23, 24), ornaments which are frequently present on contemporary Apulian red figure vases.

### 6.1 Mothering

Some ancient authors call Aphrodite's lover a child, and some mirrors show a very young *Atunis*, smaller than she is (nos. 10, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19). In addition, in some scenes he carries a necklace with a *bulla* (nos. 1, 15, 17, 19, 20). At the age of 14 boys deposited their *bullae* in the rite of passage to adulthood. This implies that *Atunis*, on ten mirrors, is depicted as being under age. *Atunis* sometimes looks effeminate, maybe due to his childhood status. On mirror no. 2, Turan's assistant *Mean* holds a dipstick in order to perfume him with a liquid from an *alabastron*. Usually, only women, especially brides, were perfumed in this way. On mirror no. 15 *Atunis* opens his mantle in a gesture of *anakalypsis* that was usually made by women who were about to marry, as in Greek wedding scenes.

Why would Etruscan women be interested in meetings between an adult, married goddess and her extremely young lover? Do we have to interpret the scenes as paedophilia, adultery, escapism, in other words wishful thinking of housewives, and/or as maternal love?

On mirror no. 12 (c. 400-350 BC; fig. 4), Turan, who is called *Turan ati* (Turan Mother), and *Atunis*, who has wings like Eros, are playing with a dove. Next to *Turan* are a mirror and a *cista* with *alabastra*, both attributes belonging to Etruscan married women.

On mirror no. 19 *Atunis* sits as a boy (he wears a *bulla*) on the knees of *Turan*. This is a reversed position: usually the woman sat on the knees of her lover (cf. no. 18). These details show that *Atunis* was seen as a half-grown man.

The scenes on nos. 12, 17, 19 and 20, however, are not explicitly sexual, since *Turan* is dressed and since the partners are not kissing. In my opinion the scenes present *Turan's* maternal feelings for a too young partner.



Figure 4 Mirror no. 12 showing *Atunis* and *Turan ati* (from Atallah 1966).



Figure 5 Mirror from Praeneste (from CSE Italia 6, 40).

The question arises as to why erotic scenes were presented on mirrors. A clue may be found on a mirror from Praeneste (ES 379, CSE Italia 6, 40; fig. 5), dated to c. 480-450 BC, showing a majestic, standing *Turan* and a seated boyish (!) *Elachsantre* (Greek Alexandros/Paris), who is about to seduce *Elina* (Greek Helena), a married woman who lies in bed under the covers, with her baby *Ermania* (Greek Hermione). Evidently Helena is depicted as a mother, and the very young Paris as victim of the love goddess. The presence of a winged sphinx above the bed, hovering in *Turan's* direction, symbolizes the arrival of misfortune. The message is clear: *Turan* is a powerful goddess, and her seduction of a man and a woman into adultery will generate disaster: the Trojan War.

## 6.2 Domesticity

Several objects, like the bed (nos. 6, 18), chair (1, 12, 17, 19), mirror (12), or *cista* for *alabastra* (5, 12) set the meeting between *Turan* and *Atunis* in a domestic context. Most interesting is no. 17 (fig. 6), which shows columns. Architectural backgrounds are frequent on mirrors of the second half of the fourth century BC, and are clearly an Etruscan addition (Wiman 1990, 147-149). Some mirrors showing the Oracle of *Urphe*/Orpheus (no. 8) have such



Figure 6 Mirror no. 17 showing *Atunis* on *Turan's* knee (from CSE BRD 1, 39).

a façade in the background, while on Attic red figure vases showing the same theme and composition (c. 420 BC), a façade is absent. The façade lends a local, Etruscan flavour to the original Greek core.

### 6.3 Identification

Two mirrors seem to show that a male donor identified himself with Atunis. The inscription on no. 24 reads:

*tite : cale : atial : turce  
malstria : cver*

‘Tite Cale to mother has given (this)  
mirror: (as) sacred (object)’

Because, as far as we know, sons did not give mirrors to their mothers, and because *ati* (mother), as we have seen, is used as an epithet of Turan, the mirror must have been a votive gift to the goddess (pace Izzet 2005; de Angelis 2002). In addition, the adjective *cvera* means ‘sacred’, the substantive *cver* ‘sacred thing’. Tite’s family name Cale may derive from the Greek adjective *kalos* (beautiful). Probably Tite compared himself to Atunis.

Mirror no. 5 shows *Atunis* as seated herdsman facing a standing *Turan* who is accompanied by *Lasa Sitmica*. Among the figures, below, we see parts of proper names, identified by Maggiani (2002, 7-8):

*arm aθ ac l a rn l a*  
in reconstruction:  
*armas a(rn)θ larnla*  
which means:  
‘Arnth Armas to Larnai (has given this).’

Probably Arnth wished to identify himself with Atunis and to compare his wife Larnai to Turan.

The splendid mirror no. 9 shows *Atunis* embracing a winged deity called *Lasa achununa* (an error; it should be read as *achuna*). Lasa, an assistant of Turan, is here obviously substituting for the love goddess. The artifact was found in a tomb of the *Achu* family in the necropolis Sperandio near Perugia; Lasa was seen as protector of the family, and if the mirror was a gift, the male giver may have identified himself with *Atunis* and his wife with a *Lasa*. The aggressive dog on the left may be hinting at *Atunis*’ fatal hunting. The context of the mirror is known: within the sarcophagus of a rich lady, as well as on top and in front of it were objects belonging to the symposium and to the *mundus muliebris*. Her golden diadem is decorated with a figure of a Lasa, which means that this goddess was her protector (*Notizie degli Scavi* 1900, 553-561). A woman’s tomb with similar grave goods (including a gold relief ring showing Lasa) was found in Todi. Both women may have been priestesses of Lasa.

### 6.4 Fate, death and return from death

The famous large mirror no. 23, from Perugia (now in Berlin) shows two couples, Atunis (inscription lost) and *Turan*, and *Meliacr* and *Atlenta* (Greek Meleagros and Atalanta). Between them stands *Athrupa* (Greek Atropos), holding a hammer and nail, about to pin a boar’s head to an invisible tree. The couples do not appear together in ancient Greek literature. Since the two men die as a consequence of a boar hunt, the engraver knew both stories and intended to make clear that death is unavoidable. Atropos is pictured like the Nikè on coins from Syracuse around 310 BC. The goddess of Victory nails the spoils of battle to a trunk as a *tropaion*, the material turning point in a battle. The winged woman with a *thyrsos* in her right hand emerging from an acanthus calyx on the mirror, however, may contain a positive Dionysian message, rebirth from death. She is visible without *thyrsos* in exergue on two mirrors with birth scenes (*ES* 166; 5, 77). She appears frequently on Apulian red figure vases starting from c. 350 BC.

The very large mirror no. 15, in St. Petersburg, situates the love scene in a cosmic setting. The broad border shows six hovering, winged personifications: from left to right *Alpan*, *Achvisr* and *Munthch*, and from right to left, an unlabelled Muse with lyre, [---] *uch* (probably Munthuch again), and *Mean*. These figures often have interchangeable attributes. *Mean* often personifies victory, *Munthch* (from *Munthuch*) holds her *alabastron* and dipstick. The latter name is akin to the Latin adjective and substantive *mundus* (elegant; heaven; ritual heaven-like pit), which has two meanings, like Greek *kosmos* (ornament; heaven). The presence of the Muse can also be related to heaven; according to Macrobius (*Comment on Scipio’s dream* 2.3.4), the Etruscans saw Camenae (Muses) as ‘the song of heaven’ (pace Briquel 2009). Above the tang a satyr, labelled *Hathna*, is emptying an amphora between two panthers who are stealing upon it. The scene may be symbolic, since similar scenes in Etruscan and Roman art seem to mean that the Dionysian drinking of wine could make souls immortal.

Both mirror images seem to illustrate the hope of return from death.

### 6.5 Ritualization

Seven mirror scenes show Turan and Atunis as nude or almost nude partners (nos. 1, 4, 6, 9, 11, 14, 21). Here they are the same height and are evidently depicted as adults, clearly not in accordance with the Greek myth. The scenes testify to a realistic *interpretatio etrusca*. On no. 21 they are covered by a common mantle, on no. 4 they are joined by a common fillet around their necks, attributes that stress the union of equal lovers. The covering mantle or blanket symbolizes the Etruscan wedding ceremony as is illustrated on a stone house-model from Poggio Gaiella, near Chiusi, dated to c. 500 BC (Van der Meer 1991).



Exceptional is on no. 8 the presence of *Atunis* lying together face to face with *Turan* (unlabelled) in the exergue above the main scene representing the Oracle of *Urphe* (Greek *Orpheus*). Maggiani (1992: 3-4; cf. idem 2002, 12) suggests that if the mirror was a wedding gift, the prophecy scene and the couple in the exergue may be interpreted as forecasting good luck.

7

## A LATE FUNERARY RITUAL

The last indication of a ritual in honour of *Atunis* is a funerary terracotta monument which looks like a sarcophagus, representing a wounded *Atunis* accompanied by his mourning hunting dog (c. 250-200 BC). It never contained a corpse or ashes, however, since the bottom has openings. It was found in a necropolis of Tuscania, a city belonging to the territory of Tarquinia. It has many little holes in the back (fig. 7) and sides. Sannibale (2009) presumes that the holes were used for the evaporation of gasses during the baking process. Torelli (1997, 233-4) suggests, without however offering any supporting arguments, that twigs were inserted into the holes. An Apulian red figure *pelikè*, dated to c. 330 BC, depicts



Figure 7 Terracotta 'sarcophagus' from Tuscania (from Sannibale 2009).

*Adonis* (labelled) lying on a bed, threatened by a *Fury* with a torch, foreshadowing his imminent death (fig. 8). Reversed twigs are sprouting from under the bed, which suggests



Figure 8 Apulian red figure vase (from Berger-Doer 1979).

rebirth. Interestingly, the neck of the vase shows, as on another Apulian funerary vase, Zeus as arbiter between Aphrodite and Persephone. No baby chest is present but a young, nude Adonis himself stands nearby. It is an indication that apart from the chest story there was a second version, in which Zeus or Hades decided that Adonis, after his fatal hunting had to spend six months with Aphrodite and six months with Persephone (Berger-Doer 1979).

The 'sarcophagus' from Tuscania may have been taken out of a funerary chapel or tomb every year in order to be adorned with short living twigs. When the twigs died, it was brought back to its original place. The ritual may have looked like the sprouting and dying process of plants at Gravisca.

## 8 CONCLUSION

In sum, Adonis rituals were present in Etruria from c. 500 BC until the first century AD. The origins can be found in Athens and the Phoenician world.

The rituals at Athens and Gravisca make clear that each year, in the course of the summer, Adonis came alive and died symbolically.

The visual models for the oldest mirror images came from Athens. The scenes got gradually more figures, thus becoming Etruscanized. They were polysemantic, as may be deduced from their symbolism, moralization, domesticity, and identification. Some show erotic meetings, others Atunis as too young lover, maybe warning about unequal love, adultery, hunting, and the inevitability of death. Some may show that a male donor of a mirror associated himself with beautiful Atunis and his wife with Turan or her substitute, Lasa. Atunis mirrors disappeared after c. 280 BC, at the same time and probably due to the end of Greek, Faliscan and Etruscan red figure vase painting, and the Roman conquest of South Etruria.

## Acknowledgements

My warm thanks are due to Larissa Bonfante, Henk Versnel and Fernando Gilotta for their very useful comments.

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