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The conception of time among the Etruscans

Marjatta Nielsen

It belongs to the haphazards of the survival of the classical tradition that anything at all has been transmitted to us about the conception of time among the Etruscans. After their culture and language vanished, there was no need to keep copying the first-hand records written in the Etruscan language throughout the centuries. Yet, through Roman writers we do have some information about the Etruscan doctrines regarding the division of time and space.¹

The most important source about these matters is the Roman grammarian Censorinus' *de die natali*, written in 238 AD. Fortunately, he painstakingly followed reliable sources, among others, Varro's *Tuscae historiae*, which were probably based on first-hand Etruscan information.

1 On *disciplina etrusca*, C.O. Thulin, *Die etruskische Disciplin* 1-3, (Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrif 1906-1909); more accessible, A.J. Pfiffig, *Die etruskische Religion* (Graz 1975, reprinted in Wiesbaden 1998) esp. 36-43; about the doctrine of *saecula*, 159-161. On p.161 Pfiffig proposes to change the *saeculum* accounts, bringing the 10th *saeculum* to an end already in 83 BC, in order to get them fit better to his ideas about the Etruscan history. But there is no need of changing the sources, which conform almost too well with the historical realities. Further, M. Pallottino, *The Etruscans* (Harmondsworth, ed. 1978), 138-152; A. Maggiani, in: *Gli Etruschi, una nuova immagine*, ed. M. Cristofani et.al. (Firenze 1984) 136-151; many contributions in *Etrusca disciplina - Culti stranieri in Etruria, Relazioni nei convegni del 1987 e del 1988*, Annali della Fondazione per il Museo 'Claudio Faina' 5 (Orvieto 1998); *Les Étrusques, les plus religieux des hommes, Actes du colloque international Galeries nationales du Grand Palais* 1992 eds. F. Gaultier / D. Briquel, Xlles Rencontres de l'École du Louvre (Paris 1997 [1998]); further references in F.-H. Massa-Pairault, *La cité des Étrusques* (Paris 1996), 255.

On the impact of the *saecula* doctrine on Etruscan historiography and conception of time, see also M. Sordi, *I rapporti romano-eteriti e l'origine della civitas sine suffragio* (Roma 1960), esp. 177-181; F.-H. Massa Pairault, 'La divination, l'histoire étrusque et l'histoire vue par les Étrusques', *Secondo Congresso Internazionale Etrusco, Firenze 1985, Atti 3* (Roma 1989) 1191-1198.

The doctrine of the *saecula*

According to Censorinus (17,5), the Etruscans believed that both the earth, their nation, their city-states, and the individuals had been bestowed a certain period of time on the earth. The earth itself would last for twelve millennia, *chiliades*, while the Etruscans had been given only one of them, divided into ten *saecula*. From Varro he knew the exact lengths of the seven first ones (Cens. 17,6). Yet, a *saeculum* did not necessarily last for hundred years, but it corresponded to the life-span of the longest-living person, born in the first year of a new *saeculum*.

This must have required quite a bit of anagraphic administration. On the other hand, the gods helped in keeping the record, giving a very clear sign, *ostentum saeculare*, when a *saeculum* was over and a new one was to begin. Here the priests, *haruspices*, had a finger in the play, and a chance of manipulating the course of history. In fact, only the first four *saecula* lasted one hundred years. Halfway on their path on the earth, the Etruscans had got taste for staying there, being as they were at the peak of their power. The fifth *saeculum* lasted for 123 years, and then followed two *saecula*, 119 years each.

Varro wrote his *Tuscae historiae* in the eighth *saeculum*. We do not know its length, but let us suppose that it, too, had stuck up to the groove of 119 years. Anyway, from Plutarch's *Sulla* (7, 4ff.) we gather that in 88 BC a trumpet signal was heard from the heaven, announcing the end of the eighth *saeculum*. There were still two laps to go, but the political situation did not leave much time for an independent Etruscan nation, and the schedule was adjusted according to the realities. Already in 44 BC a comet showed up, and the close of the ninth *saeculum* was declared.

When the tenth *saeculum* ended, is not known either, if there was anyone left to keep an eye on *finis nominis Etrusci*. The fact is that the last traces of the Etruscan language and cultural identity vanished in the course of the Augustan period, with only few stubborn survivors left in the Northern Etruscan city of Volterra.² So, after all, the accounts balance: earlier gains were lost again, and a

2 The last phase of the Etruscan culture has mostly been omitted, or seen only from a Roman angle, in books on Etruscan culture and history. On the survival of Etruscan culture down to the Augustan age at Volterra, e.g. M. Nielsen, 'The Lid Sculptures of Volaterran Cinerary Urns', in *Studies in the Romanization of Etruria*, ed. P. Bruun, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 5 (Roma 1975), esp. 325-389; three lid figures are still later, from Tiberius' or Claudius' times, M. Nielsen, in *Artigianato artistico*, Cat. mostra Volterra-Chiusi 1985, ed. A. Maggiani (Milano 1985) 46-47, no. 18-20

new millennium did begin without Etruscans existing as a nation on the earth.

Counting back from the 'certain' data (given in bold), we get the following time-table for the *nomen Etruscum*:

- 1st saeculum **100 years**: 968 - 868 BC
- 2nd saeculum **100 years**: 868 - 768 BC
- 3rd saeculum **100 years**: 768 - 668 BC (introduction of writing)
- 4th saeculum **100 years**: 668 - 568 BC (growing hegemony)
- 5th saeculum **123 years**: 568 - 445 BC (peak of Etruscan power)
- 6th saeculum **119 years**: 445 - 326 BC
- 7th saeculum **119 years**: 326 - 207 BC
- 8th saeculum **119 years?**: 207 - **88 BC** (end of independence)
- 9th saeculum **44 years**: **88 - 44 BC**
- 10th saeculum **44 years?**: 44 BC - 0 ?

My conjecture of repeating the duration of 44 years also for the last *saeculum* would bring about really perfect timing, too good to be true, with all respect to Etruscan prophetic capacities. Perhaps the last Etruscans already closed the door by joining Augustus' *ludi saeculari* in 17 BC. Augustus did not follow the old schedule for Roman centennial celebrations, but chose a new one to mark the beginning of a new era.³

The approximate duration of the ten *saecula* happens to correspond almost too well to the archaeological and historical evidence of a distinct, Etruscan culture, and not only as regards the end of the Etruscan millennium. The schedule also fits with the most up-to-date archaeological data regarding the beginning of the Iron-Age culture, the so-called Villanova culture, which was distributed in the very same areas where the Etruscans would be living when they had learned to write - Etruria proper, Etruria Padana, and Campania.⁴

3 The emperor Claudius returned to the old Roman schedule celebrating the end of the eight Roman *saeculum* in 47 AD.

4 G. Bartoloni, *La cultura villanoviana. All'inizio della storia etrusca* (Roma 1989); A.M. Bietti Sestieri, *Protostoria. Teoria e pratica* (Roma 1996); latest chronological studies compared in *The Iron Age in Europe, Colloquia vol. 12*, eds. A.M. Bietti Sestieri/V. Kruta, XIII International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (Forlì 1996).

Cyclical conception of time and previsions about the future

Whatever the credibility of all this may be, the doctrine of the *saecula* as part of the Etruscan religion, *disciplina etrusca*, also implied a cyclical, repetitive conception of time. It belonged to the priests' duties to keep record of natural phenomena and to connect them with important happenings. The record did not only serve as a memory of the past: it was first and foremost meant as an instrument when predicting the future. The gods expressed their will by sending signs, analogous to those already sent at similar occasions. The past was projected into the future, by 'scientific' methods.

The Etruscans developed a series of divinatory techniques. They also had a keen eye on divination methods elsewhere in the ancient world, and there was much mutual borrowing. The Etruscan expertise was widely recognized, and especially the Romans were heavily relying on Etruscans in the field of *haruspicina*.

Archaeological evidence shows that the Etruscans themselves were interested in keeping the disciplin alive in the second and first centuries BC.⁵ And, in the first century BC, they were actively involved in handing the tradition over to the Romans, writing treatises of the art of divination in Latin, and translating their sacred texts in order to save them to the posterity. Obviously the Etruscans did realize by now that the end was close. This rescue operation did prolong the art of *haruspicina* by several centuries.⁶

5 In Tarquinia sarcophagi with the deceased represented as *haruspices* or other priests range from the fourth to the early second centuries BC, while in Chiusi they belong to the late third and early second centuries BC; see A. Maggiani, 'Immagini di aruspici', in *II Congresso int. etrusco 1985*, Atti 3 (Firenze 1989), 1557-1563. The Volterranean lid figure holding the liver of the sacrificial animal (Volterra, Museo Guarnacci, inv. 136) belongs to the first century BC, the same period when another Volterranean, Aulus Caecina, was writing books on *disciplina etrusca* in Latin. - Also the bronze liver from Piacenza, a memory-aid for an unsecure *haruspex*, belongs to a relatively late date, A. Maggiani, 'Qualche osservazione sul fegato di Piacenza', *Studi Etruschi* 50 (1982 [1984], 53-88; 53-; L.B. van der Meer 1987, *The bronze liver of Piacenza: analysis of a polytheistic structure*, Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 2 (Amsterdam 1987).

6 Much literature on the subject, see e.g. A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, 4. Divination italique: étrusque, latine, romaine (Paris 1882); J.R.M. Wood, *The Haruspices in the Roman World to the End of the*

By all means, the art of divination was not any Etruscan prerequisite. Everywhere in the ancient world - and still today - predictions about the future played a major role in decision-making. Everywhere much weight was laid on the interpretation of omens, portents, dreams, oracular revelations, prophecies and so on.⁷ As now, previsions about the future oscillated between religion and superstition, experience and humbug, money-making and politics. And, as elsewhere, the instrumentalization of the past as well as that of the future, in the service of present needs, was much in the hands of the élite.⁸

Republic (London 1982); B. MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation: a study in religion and politics in Republican Rome*, Collection Latomus 177 (Bruxelles 1987); E. Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (London 1985) 27-30; S. Montero Herrero and L. Manino, in *Secondo Congresso Internazionale Etrusco* (1985), vol. 3 (Roma 1989), 1213-1223, and 1225-1235 respectively; several contributions in *Les Écrivains du siècle d'Auguste et l'etrusca disciplina*, Caesarodunum suppl. 60 (1991); M. Cristofani, 'Le città etrusche e Roma', *Eutopia* 4:2 (1995) 21-31; the contributions by Aigner-Foresti, Dobesch, Camporeale, Firpo, Sordi, Briquel, Montero, and Capdeville, in *Die Integration der Etrusker und das Weiterwirken etruskischen Kulturgutes im republikanischen und kaiserzeitlichen Rom*, ed. L. Aigner-Foresti, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse, Sitzungsberichte 658 (Wien 1998).

The acceptance of Etruscan expertise in foreseeing the future did not seem to have affected the conception of history among the Romans, according to G.B. Miles, *Livy. Reconstructing Early Rome* (Ithaca/London 1995) 75-109.

7 Cf. *Iliad* 1.70, the prophet knew 'the things that are and will be and were before'; cf. on time and eternity, M.R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity* (London/New York 1995) 126-144. On divination in Antiquity, still fundamental, A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, 1-4 (Paris 1879-1882); R. Bloch, *La divinazione nell'antichità* (Napoli 1995); a very recent presentation for a wider public, S. Ribichini, 'Astri, segni, sogni e profezie. La divinazione nel mondo antico', Dossier in *Archeo* 14:8/162 (1998) 59-91.

8 Cf. B. Lincoln, *Discourse and the construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York/Oxford 1989) esp. 38-50.

Past, present and future: time levels in Etruscan art⁹

Among the Etruscans, however, the cyclical conception of time also found expression in their art, the first-hand surviving evidence from their culture. This means that the doctrine did influence the perception of time among living people.

Among the thousands of figured scenes in Etruscan art, most can be interpreted without too many difficulties, and to a surprisingly large extent as depicting Greek myths. When some details do not seem to fit to any known myth, the solution to the problem has mostly been to consider any deviations as results of Etruscan misunderstandings.

When preparing the publication of the late Etruscan funerary art at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen,¹⁰ I saw that some of the Chiusine urn reliefs from the early second century BC had been subject to highly diverging interpretations, the only common denominators being the so-called Etruscan misunderstandings. But, since the urn reliefs in question were made by some of the most accomplished sculptors, I preferred to seek for other solutions.

A workable key of interpretation was provided by the pictorial program of the Tomba François at Vulci, as proposed by Filippo Coarelli in 1977, and widely followed by other scholars.¹¹ There, representations of events happening

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- 9 A shorter version of the rest of this article was presented as a paper in Amsterdam in July 1998: 'Past, present and future. The conception of time in Etruscan imagery', in *XVth International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Abstracts* (Amsterdam 1998) 106-107.
 - 10 M. Moltesen / M. Nielsen eds., *Etruria and Central Italy 350-30 B.C.* Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Copenhagen 1996).
 - 11 F. Coarelli, 'Le pitture della tomba François a Vulci: una proposta di lettura', *Dialoghi di Archeologia*, 3.ser. 3 (1983), 43-69 (but held already in 1977); reprinted in F. Coarelli, *Revixit ars* (Roma 1996), 138-178 (spec. 177-178), with reference to Sordi 1960 (cit. note 1) about the conception of time among the Etruscans. Further, L. Bonfante, 'Historical Art: Etruscan and Early Roman', *American Journal of Ancient History* 1978, 136-162; R. Brilliant, *Visual narratives. Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman art* (Ithaca/London 1984) 30-32; F.-H. Massa Pairault, in *Secondo Congresso Internazionale Etrusco (1985)*, Atti 3 (Roma 1989) 1191-1198; P.J. Holliday, 'Narrative Structures in the François Tomb', in *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art*, ed. P.J. Holliday (Cambridge 1993) 175-197; M. Harari, 'Ipotesi sulle regole del montaggio narrativo nella pittura vascolare etrusca', in *Modi e funzioni del racconto mitico nella ceramica greca italica ed etrusca dal VI al IV secolo a.C.*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale Raito di Vietri sul Mare 1994 (Salerno 1995) 103-135, esp. 109; Massa-Pairault,

at different times were deliberately brought together to convey the idea of the interdependence between the past, the present, and the future: every event is conditioned by the past, and will have consequences in the future.¹²

Such a cyclical conception could also be expressed within one and the same scene, not only by depicting different moments of a story, sequences of *past* happenings, according to the normal techniques of pictorial narration,¹³ but also by including allusions to the *future*, by introducing figures of soothsayers, prophets, dreamers, or the like.

Mirrors: auspicia and Providentia

On Etruscan mirrors, different time levels could be achieved even by bringing together only two or three figures, whose identities were often explained by inscriptions. From hundreds of possibilities, I only illustrate here one case, a

La cité des Étrusques (Paris 1996) 93, 183-187.

As to the figure of Vel Saties and Arnza, A. Maggiani has seen Arnza, not as a dwarf, but as a child being taught in the art of the *augurium* (in *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 3.ser. 2:1 (1983) 74). C. Weber-Lehmann sees Arnza just as a boy playing with a pet bird, held in string, in *XVth International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Abstracts* (Amsterdam 1998) 178. This does not necessarily invalidate the basic notion behind the pictorial program of the tomb, since the presence of the next generation, the child, brings in the aspect of future, and the Greek mythical soothsayers still remain on the walls. - On the dress of Vel Saties, latest M. Lesky, in *Integration der Etrusker* (cf. note 6) 177-185.

- 12 The question is, how long back the division of time can be traced in Etruscan art. Recent studies have argued that at least division of the *kosmos* in space, by gender, and by duties is an early feature, cf. M. Menichetti, *Archeologia del potere. Re, immagini e miti a Roma e in Etruria in età arcaica* (Milano 1994); M. Harari (cf. note 11; but with d'Agostino's objections in disc. p. 244-245); M. Torelli, *Il rango, il rito e l'immagine. Alle origini della rappresentazione storica romana* (Milano 1997); M. Nielsen, 'Etruscan Women: A Cross-Cultural Perspective', in *Aspects of Women in Antiquity*, Proceedings of the First Nordic Symposium on Women's Lives in Antiquity, Göteborg 1997, eds. L. Larsson Lovén / A. Strömberg (SIMA Pocket-Book) Jonsered, in press.
- 13 Brilliant 1984 (cf. note 11). See also M. Cristofani, 'La decorazione frontonale in Italia centrale fra IV e II secolo a.C.: scelte iconografiche e stile', in *La coroplastica templare etrusca fra il IV e il II secolo a.C., Atti conv. Orbetello 1988* (Firenze 1992) 37-55, on cyclical representations esp. 50-53.

mirror from Arezzo.¹⁴ It has no inscriptions, but the lady to the left can easily be identified as Ariadne, because she is holding a bobbin with the ¹⁵thread which rescued Theseus, while the *thyrsos* in her left hand alludes to her later marriage with Dionysos. Another woman is standing to the right. The *cista* with perfume bottles might identify her as Helen, whom Theseus - in the middle - also abducted, according to some versions of the legend, also known in Etruria. This is shown by other, inscribed mirrors.¹⁶

Another example is given by Larissa Bonfante, in her perceptive description of a mirror in New York.¹⁷ Odysseus and Kirke are accompanied by the ghost of Elpenor, who leads the thoughts to the next, Underworld scene, in the Odyssey. Also Maurizio Harari connects Etruscan mirror scenes, as the popular Dioskouroi, to the cyclical conception of time.¹⁸

Divination scenes are quite common on Etruscan mirrors.¹⁹ This may have had a twofold reason. Mirrors made part of the bride's trousseau, and secured her lasting beauty. At weddings the thoughts went to the future and to happy *auspicia* regarding the continuation of family traditions in future generations.²⁰ On the other hand, the intangible mirror image may have been thought as belonging to the realm of shades, dreams and predictions. In later times mirror was the attribute of *Providentia* - perhaps the idea of looking into the future made part of the symbolism of the mirror already at that time.

14 M. Nielsen, in press (cit. n. 12) fig. 9., n. 39 with refs.

15 L.B. van der Meer, *Interpretatio etrusca. Greek Myths on Etruscan Mirrors* (Amsterdam 1995) 51-54.

16 L. Bonfante, *Corpus Speculorum Etruscorum*, USA 3, New York Metropolitan Museum (Rome 1997), no. 15.

17 M. Harari (cit. note 11), 103-135.

18 Van der Meer 1995 (cit. note 15) 83-104.

19 Cf. M. Nielsen, 'Women and Family in a Changing Society: A Quantitative Approach to Late Etruscan Burials', *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 17-18 (1989) 71-72.

20 Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 345: H. Brunn, *I rilievi delle urne etrusche* 1 (Roma 1870) pl. 80:10; M. Nielsen, 'Cultural Orientations in Etruria in the Hellenistic Period: Greek Myths and Local Motifs on Volterranean Urn Reliefs', in *Aspects of Hellenism in Italy*, eds. P. Guldager Bilde/I. Nielsen/M. Nielsen, *Acta Hyperborea* 5 (Copenhagen 1993) 329 fig. 2.

Funerary art: synthesis of time

On cinerary urns, the single figures are seldom furnished with explanatory inscriptions. However, a few are, as a Volterranean relief.²¹ The inscriptions prove that the urn shows several scenes from the Oresteia, with Orestes himself appearing at least twice, if not thrice.

Also Chiusine sculptors were experimenting with several versions of the Oresteia, and the same composition was also adapted into the Etrusco-Roman legend of the Vibenna brothers (whom we also know from the François tomb) capturing the soothsayer Cacus. One such scene comes from the tomb of the Purni family near Chiusi.²² One of the masterpieces of the same sculptor is an urn in Copenhagen, coming from the same tomb.²³ The relief theme has mostly been interpreted as once again Cacus and the Vibenna brothers - though with some misunderstandings. The Etruscans were obviously unable to get anything right even when depicting their own stories.

Instead, I have tried to demonstrate that we have here a masterly combination of some key moments in Oresteia, perhaps according to the version known from Sophocles' *Elektra*. Apollon marks the dividing line between the past and present events, and the future developments of the story. In order to be able to return home without being murdered by Aegisthos, Orestes had spread the rumour of his own death, and is pretending to be a friend, who has brought the ashes to be buried at home. Orestes is sitting in anguished thoughts on Agamemnon's grave, planning to murder his mother Clytemnestra, a revenge put into his mind by Apollon, but fitting all too well with his own wishes. Apollon is casually leaning on a sword, pointing towards the breast of the sleeping Clytemnestra, tormented by a nightmare, in which she is foreseeing her own death. Here we have no less than three persons seeing into the future.

21 Florence Museo Archeologico 74233. On the motif, latest s.v. Cacus, in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (=LIMC) 3 1986, 175-177, with refs. On the compositorial variations between the Cacus and the Orestes motifs, F.-H. Massa-Pairault, *Recherches sur l'art et l'artisanat étrusco-italiques à l'époque hellénistique* (Rome 1985) 55.

22 Nielsen, in *Etruria and Central Italy* 1996 (cf. note 10), cat.no. 28.

23 Ibid., no. 31.

The prehistory of the Trojan War

The problem with the subject of another Chiusine urn relief in Copenhagen was even harder to solve.²⁴ The earlier interpretations have taken outset either from the figure of an Amazon embracing a youth, or from the figure of Odysseus to the right. The Amazon would be Penthesileia falling in love with Achilleus, who does not, however, resemble a heroic warrior at all. Odysseus, in turn, would be slaughtering Penelope's suitors aided by Telemachos, who, however, is not only using a wrong weapon, but is risking to shoot his own father. Another Chiusine relief wisely puts them on the same side.²⁵

Here I propose a third interpretation, which I only sketched out in a few lines in the above-mentioned catalogue. In this interpretation, I suggested that the Chiusine sculptor invented an original composition, in which he managed to describe the whole prehistory of the Trojan war, with the Trojan prince Paris/Alexandros as the key figure, appearing no less than thrice, namely the three figures most to the left:

a) as a child, exposed on Mount Ida and believed to be dead - we see the small boy sitting naked on the ground and hiding his face with his hands; b) as a youth, the anonymous winner of the funeral games arranged in his honour, recognized by his sister Cassandra, who had tried to kill him with the axe, because she foresaw the disasters he would cause: the abduction of Helen, the outburst of the Trojan war, and its outcome, disastrous for Troy. Here the brother and sister are already being reconciled, by the altar on which Paris had sought salvation. He has dropped the customary palm leaf, sign of victory, but he is wearing a wreath on his head. And finally, and c) Paris as an adult, combatting in the Trojan war against the Greeks, here represented only by Odysseus, the pilos-clad man to the utmost right.

On Etruscan urns - as well as in surviving fragments of Greek tragedies -

24 Brunn 1870 (cf. note 20), pl. 98:7.

25 Brunn 1870 (note 20) 4-22, pls. 1-16; *LIMC* 1 (1981), 494-529, s.v. Alexandros. On the literary evidence and the relationship with Etruscan urn reliefs, B. Snell, *Euripides Alexandros und andere Strassburger Papyri mit Fragmenten griechischer Dichter*, Hermes Einzelschriften 5 (Berlin 1937); F. Jouan, *Euripide et les légendes des chants cypriens. Des origines de la guerre de Troie à l'Iliade* (Disp. Paris 1966) 113-142; R.A. Coles, *A New Oxyrhynchus Papyrus: The Hypothesis of Euripides' Alexandros*, University of London, Institute of Classical Studies, Bulletin suppl. 32 (London 1974), esp. 26-32 a discussion on the reconstruction of the tragedy versions, also in the light of the Etruscan urns.

there are several versions of the recognition of Paris, with either his brother Deiphobos threatening him with a sword, or his sister Cassandra, or his mother Hekabe swinging the axe in order to kill him.²⁶ The reason for the aggression was first the shame, which the supposed slave-winner of the games would have inflicted upon the royal house, and then because of Cassandra's attempt to prevent future disasters.

In the Copenhagen urn there remains an enigmatic figure, sitting in the middle of the turmoil, as if in own thoughts. There may be several candidates as to the identity of the figure. The short-cut hair and the golden wreath round the head have normally brought about an identification of the figure as a male one, in spite of the girt *chiton*, worn by women. I cannot exclude that the figure might once more be Paris, in a slave's girt gown, but with a royal or athletic wreath on his head.²⁷ But why this passivity?

Another possibility might be Paris' brother Helenos, bestowed with capacities of seeing into the future. F.-H. Massa-Pairault has recently proposed to interpret the whole scene as the capture of Helenos by Odysseus, who pressed him to reveal how Troy could be conquered.²⁸ She only identifies the left and right combattants as Paris and Odysseus. I suppose that she thought the youth at the altar to be Helenos, but I still think that they are Paris and Cassandra embracing each others, not one capturing the other. Our sitting figure would fit better as Helenos, a seer in his thoughts, with a royal wreath on his head. The girt chiton is not quite incompatible as the exotic costume, though to suit to a Micro-Asiatic soothsayer. But, the breasts of the figure are too clearly marked under the chiton to consent an identification as a man.

Therefore, I prefer to consider the figure as female, but wearing the short-cut hair and the golden wreath of brides and young women, which had been typical of the Etruscan brides in the Classical period, but gone out of fashion a century or so earlier.²⁹ This is not a unique example of an attempt to stage the relief scene into past times. As to her identity, from vase paintings and other Greek representations we know of several female figures which come relatively

26 No such figure resembles the iconography of Paris, see s.v. Alexandros, LIMC I (1981).

27 Massa-Pairault 1996 (cf. note 1), fig. p. 8. This book came to my hands only after I had given my paper in Amsterdam.

28 E.g. M. Torelli, *Lavinio e Roma. Riti iniziatici e matrimonio tra archeologia e storia* (Roma 1984) 31-50 about the initiation rite of cutting the hair.

29 See LIMC, under entries Helene, Penelope, Cassandra, Hekabe.

close to her iconography, though with some significant deviations.³⁰

Perhaps she might be Helen, the cause of the Trojan war, although she does not look particularly ravishing. Or perhaps she is Penelope clad as a bride, patiently waiting for the return of Odysseus - and this would draw even the Odyssey into the narrative. The iconography of the veiled and mourning Penelope was, however, too established to support this identification.

Or, she might be once more Cassandra, but not at this moment. Her eventual prophecy about the future disasters at this stage of the drama would have been given in Bacchic frenzy.³¹ Then she ought to look like the maenadic, raving woman swinging the axe, whom we encounter on many other Etruscan urns.³² Instead, this very different and old-fashioned Cassandra might refer to her sinister foreseings twenty years earlier, when Paris was born. On some urns the axe-swinging girl is quite young,³³ incompatible with her status as Paris' older sister, unless a different time level is referred to. A few Volterranean urns show at her side a man wearing a hat with an *apex*, characteristic of both shepherds and *haruspices*.³⁴ He may be the shepherd summoned to testify to Paris' real identity, but the Etruscans may have seen him as a *haruspex*, making clear the point of prophecy. Such flash-backs and predictions were very often inserted into theatrical performances by help of stage machinery, in diligent use especially in the Hellenistic period,³⁵ so this is not, as such, an Etruscan feature.

30 Her Maenad-like extacy was known both by writers as by artists. Cf. Coles 1974, 13, 26. Also Cicero (*de div.* 1,89) refers to the divination capacities of Priamos' children, Helenos and Cassandra, and points to the gender differences in their methods: Helenos' predictions were based on *auguriis*, Cassandra's were given in *mentis incitatione et permotione divina* (cf. Montero, in *Integration der Etrusker* [cit. n. 6], 370).

31 Volterra, Museo Guarnacci 384, Brunn 1870 (cit. note 20), pl. 11:24; Nielsen, in *Artigianato artistico* 1985 (cit. note 3) no. 74-75 no. 56; the short sides of the urn show a young and an older warrior, whom I propose to identify here as Paris and Odysseus, as opponents in the Trojan war, as those on the corners of our Chiusine urn.

32 Brunn 1870 (cit. note 20), pls. 8:18, 13:28.

33 Brunn 1870, pls. 12:25, 14:29.

34 Jouan 1966 (cit. n. 25) 116; cf. Coles 1974 (cit. n. 25), 30-31. On the role of stage machinery in Hellenistic theatre and, its influence on Etruscan urn reliefs, possibly through illustrated anthologies, Nielsen 1993 (cit. note 20), 343-345. The fragments of the plot, the *hypothesis*, of Euripides' *Alexandros*, published by Coles 1974, belong to an alphabetically arranged anthology of plots of plays.

35 Euripides makes Hekabe sleep (Coles 1974, 13), while Hyginus, *fab.* 91 states that

As the last candidate for the sitting woman in our relief might be considered Paris' mother, Hekabe, who, when pregnant, saw a strange dream, the interpretation of which led to the exposure of the child. The woman here does not seem to be sleeping, but rather day-dreaming,³⁶ but her old-fashioned hair-dress, her hands resting on the womb, and her introverted expression make Hekabe my favourite candidate for the figure, the starting point of the whole sequence of tragic events. Her dream - interpreted by Cassandra - led to the exposure of Paris. Then he came back and was recognized by Cassandra, and her prophecy would be fulfilled: she was not able to prevent the Trojan war from bursting out. Here the seers are women, their victims men.

One scene, multiple time levels?

The possibility of different time levels may be kept in mind also when interpreting many other enigmatic scenes in Etruscan art, whether dealing with Greek stories or not. Sometimes we might also consider the same figures as if acting in more than one moment at the same time, diachronocally, so to say.

In many Etruscan funerary scenes, a couple is shown shaking hands. The presence of death demons stages the scene to the moment of death and/or to the underworld,³⁷ but they might also convey the idea of repetition of actions, at three different moments: a) in the past, shaking hands at their wedding,

she saw the dream while *in quiete*, which may mean both 'while resting' and 'sleeping'.

Perhaps Hekabe appears as a dreamer also in an Etruscan bronze handle. F.-H. Massa-Pairault (1996, cit. n.1), 193, proposes to interpret the figures adorning the handle, found in the tomb of the Curunas in Tuscania as 'meditation on the destiny of the Homeric heroes'. The handle itself is in the shape of a chiton-clad and wreathed woman, lying in a melancholical attitude. Supported by two typhons, she is looking down towards a Homer/Satyr-like man, sitting in the conventional posture of meditation, between two winged - i.e. dead - warriors, one young, and one old. Perhaps they, too, symbolize the adversaries, Paris and Odysseus, though their iconography is not very explicit, since they are missing their characteristic head-gear, the Phrygian cap and the *pilos*.

36 Brunn/Körte, *I rilievi delle urne etrusche* 3 (1916) pls. 45-62, with variations.

37 On Etruscan Underworld scenes, much perceptive and inspiring work has been done by F. Roncalli, e.g. in *Les Étrusques, les plus religieux des hommes* (cf. note 1) 37-54; his most recent opinions are forthcoming in *Acta Hyperborea* 8.

according to the ceremony of *dextrarum iunctio*; b) in the present, taking leave from each others at the death of one of them, and c) in the future, at their reunion in the Afterlife.³⁸ Similarly, an Etruscan magistrate may be shown at the peak of his career, when alive, and, at the same time, triumphing over the death, conquering over his own mortality through fame and virtue.³⁹

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- 38 For the Vulci sarcophagus in Boston, e.g. M. Nielsen, 'Sacerdotesse e associazioni culturali femminili in Etruria: testimonianze epigrafiche ed iconografiche', *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 19 (1990) 53. The implication of different time levels when interpreting the sarcophagus reliefs have been proposed by Nielsen, in an unpublished paper, 'Buried Matriarchies: Women's Tombs in Etruria', presented to public in Rome in 1995 and in New York in February 1998 (perhaps to be published in a collective volume, *Women in Roman Society* (Opuscula Instituti Romani Finlandiae); independently, also L. Bonfante has arrived to the same conclusion, in 'Etruscan sexuality and funerary art, in *Sexuality in ancient art* 1996, ed. N.B. Kampen et al. (Cambridge 1996) 155-169; illustrated also in Massa-Pairault 1996 (cit. n. 1) 181 (without the short sides).
- 39 Brunn/Körte 3 1916 (cit. n. 36), pls. 84-92.