BANQUETS IN ETRUSCAN FUNERARY ART: FOR THE LIVING OR FOR THE DEAD?

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Abstract: This article concerns the interpretation of Etruscan funerary art featuring banqueting imagery, namely tomb paintings and decorated sarcophagi, from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods. There is no general consensus in scholarship about whether these scenes refer to banquets held in the realm of the living, such as those which might have occurred at funeral feasts, or whether they were intended to represent the afterlife existence of the deceased. This article first introduces the categories of Etruscan funerary art that will be considered, providing a descriptive overview. Then, the current scholarly arguments that banqueting imagery informs us about the realm of the living will be summarized, before providing the author’s own interpretation, with the aim of concluding that funerary art primarily informs us about the realm of the dead.

Keywords: Etruscans, Tombs, Funerary Art, Banqueting, Tomb Paintings, Sarcophagi

Introduction

In the absence of any literary sources that might shed light on Etruscan life, funerary art is used by scholars as an important source of information about daily life, culture, and society. It is often employed to this end alongside evidence from settlements and religious sites. Equally, this artistic production is commonly related to the realm of the dead, as referring to the Underworld existence of the deceased individuals. Many scholars argue that funerary art informs us about the world of the living, as the funerary assemblage provided to a deceased family member formed a means by which the surviving relatives could articulate their status. However, this article counters these arguments, presenting evidence that the individual to be interred within a tomb could have influenced its decoration and that the limited scope for viewing funerary art meant that it could not have been employed for status articulation. This article concludes that Etruscan funerary art provides a window into the hoped-for afterlife existence of the deceased.

To this end, banqueting scenes in particular will be considered, as it is an iconographic theme that appears with great regularity in funerary contexts (Pieraccini 2000: 35). Banqueting scenes have also been chosen because they elicit the greatest variety of interpretations in modern scholarship and they are linked with equal frequency to the realms of the living and the dead. The chronological scope of this essay will cover the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods (c.580-c.100 BC), as it was during this epoch that Etruscan artistic production was at its most plentiful. Considerations will be limited to tomb paintings and decorated sarcophagi.

Figure 1 A detailed map of Etruria, indicating major centers referenced in this article.

Source: Warden 2008: 18

Survey of Funerary Art

The first category of funerary art that will be considered comprises the paintings found on the walls of tombs. In southern Etruria, where the softness of the stone permitted, tombs were...
carved below ground (Steingraber 2016: 146). In the Archaic and Hellenistic periods, the superstructure most commonly took the form of a cube (Steingraber 2009: 64). Rows of uniform cube tombs, likened in scholarship to the appearance of modern terraced housing (Barker & Rasmussen 2000: 234), lined the roads giving access to cities (Izzet 2000: 41). Fig. 2 illustrates the typical arrangement of these cube tombs at Cerveteri. The substructure beneath these cubes was formed by a hollow in the tufo rock, allowing space for an inhumation and the deposition of grave goods. These subterranean cavities could be of a considerable size. The famous Francois Tomb from Vulci, dated to the last quarter of the fourth century BC (Fig. 3), comprises a 27m long dromos and multiple chambers. Tombs could be painted, with the paint applied directly to the walls such as at Cerveteri, or using the fresco technique seen at Tarquinia (Van der Zon 2011: 103). The majority of extant tomb paintings come from the Tarquinian necropolis of Monterozzi (Van der Zon, 2011: 102). The earliest tomb paintings in Tarquinia are thought to have begun in the sixth century BC, and production continued until the Hellenistic period (Smith 2014: 53). The restricted nature of the phenomenon of tomb painting is thought to mark it out as an aristocratic conceit; just 2% of the total number of tombs from Tarquinia were painted (D’Agostino 1989: 7; Ridgway 2004-2006: 128). The elite character of tomb painting is generally accepted in scholarship (Izzet 2007: 112).

Figure 2 Cube tombs at Cerveteri, dated to the late sixth century BC.
Source: Cristofani 1979: 24

Banqueting imagery in tomb paintings usually comprises all, or a selection of, the following motifs: male and female banqueters reclining on couches; food and drink items; banqueting equipment such as tables and drinking vessels; and servants who entertain the guests with music and dancing, or are shown serving refreshments (Pieraccini 2000: 35). One example comes from the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing at Tarquinia, dated to 510 BC (Fig. 4). Painted on the end wall are opulently dressed banqueters reclining on klinai, attended by musicians and servants (Steingraber 2006: 72). Preparations for banquets are also represented in tomb paintings. This is demonstrated in Fig. 5, a scene from the mid-fourth century BC Golini I Tomb at Orvieto, where a baking oven is shown in use (Steingraber 2006: 212).

Figure 3 Plan of the Francois Tomb at Vulci, dated to the late fourth century BC.
Alongside painted tombs, Etruscan sarcophagi will also be considered. These were produced from the sixth century BC down to the Roman period (Van Der Meer 2004: 7). These sarcophagi were made from terracotta or stone, and held the bodies or cremated remains of the deceased. 148 carved stone sarcophagi are known to us today, with the vast majority coming from Tarquinia and Tuscania (Van Der Meer 2004: 4). Again, these sarcophagi are thought to be the products of the high elite, due to the expense that their manufacture would have incurred (Swaddling 2002b: 5). In addition, many can be linked through the inscriptions and the symbols of office represented on the sarcophagi to owners with prominent magisterial and priestly positions (Van Der Meer 2004: 123).

On sarcophagus lids, the deceased are commonly represented in three-dimensional sculpture, reclining in the manner of a banqueter on a couch. This motif is known in the Archaic period, from the Sarcophagus of the Couple found in the Banditaccia necropolis at Cerveteri, dated 520-510 BC, illustrated in Fig.6. A husband and wife are shown reclining as banqueters on the terracotta sarcophagus; the wife’s arm rests on a wineskin, also alluding to the banquet (Haynes 2000: 217). The theme continues into the Hellenistic period, with the late fourth century sarcophagus of Velthur Partunu from Tarquinia (Fig.7) where the deceased is represented reclining on a banqueting couch (Haynes 2000: 294). Women could also be represented alone as banqueters on the lids of their sarcophagi. A notable example of this is the sarcophagus of Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa, dated around 150 BC (Fig.8). The reclining figure of Seianti is shown on the lid. Her representation as a banqueter is confirmed by the presence of finger rings on her left hand, while her right hand is entirely bare. This alludes to the fact that the right hand would be used for eating whilst reclining at a banquet, so to prevent her rings from being soiled by food, Seianti would have only adorned her left hand (Swaddling 2002a: 1). These sculpted images of banqueters on sarcophagus lids replaced the banqueters in tomb paintings after the production of painting ceased (Ridgway 2004-2006: 131).

Figure 4 Scene from the back wall of the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing at Tarquinia, dated to 510 BC. A husband and wife recline at a banquet.
Source: Steingraber 2006: 86-7

Figure 5 A modern artist’s reconstructive drawing of a scene of baking bread from the Golini I Tomb at Orvieto, dated to the mid fourth century BC.
Source: Steingraber 2006: 212

Figure 6 Terracotta Sarcophagus of the Couple from Cerveteri, dated 520-510 BC.
Synthesis of Scholarly Thought

Banqueting scenes have been widely studied and variously interpreted as reflecting both the living and the dead (e.g. Tuck: 1994, Pieraccini: 2000). The problems of interpretation stem from the fact that the setting of banqueting scenes in tomb paintings is often unclear. In some examples, such as the Tomb of the Lionesses from Tarquinia, dated 520-510 BC, the banqueting scene has an explicitly otherworldly setting, as indicated by the presence of a dado which represents the sea (Ridgway 2004-2006: 128). The watery dado, complete with leaping dolphins, is shown in Fig.9. This relates to the Etruscan religious belief that a journey by sea was necessary to reach the Underworld (Holliday 1990: 80). However, the Tomb of the Lionesses is an isolated case. In most tombs, the setting of the banqueting scenes, whether in life or the afterlife, is indistinct (Smith 2014: 56). Another problem is that scholars do not know how the Etruscans conceptualized the afterlife (Bonfante 2000: 268). Some arguments have been made that the evident investment in Etruscan tomb architecture and tomb goods indicates a great care for, and preoccupation with, the afterlife (Warden 2008: 95), but it is difficult to say more beyond this. That the Etruscans conceived of an afterlife in some sense is indicated by allusions to the *libri Acheruntici* from later Roman (Servius *ad Vergil Aeneid* 8.398) and Early Christian (Arnobius *Adversus nationes*. 2.62) writers. These books supposedly revealed Etruscan views of the afterlife and immortality (Briquel 2007: 157), but unfortunately they are now lost.

These problems explain why the interpretation of funerary art is so contentious. This section presents the arguments expounded in scholarship that banqueting scenes in funerary art inform us about the world of the living. These arguments are made on three grounds. Firstly, that these banquet scenes represent activities in which the elite were engaged in daily life. Secondly, that the banquets represented in tomb paintings reflect real banquets that were held at aristocratic funerals. Finally, banquets in funerary art are concluded to reflect the world of the living on the grounds that funerary art was supposedly manipulated by surviving individuals in order to preserve the status equilibrium within society.

Banquet scenes from tombs are thought to reflect the realm of the living because they represent activities in which the elite were engaged in daily life. That banquets were part of elite Etruscan life is generally accepted. The
presence of a banqueting scene on the revetment plaques from the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate, alongside other status-defining behaviors such as horseracing and ritual processions (Fig. 10), is testament to this (Rathje 1994: 95). Banqueting was additionally featured on the decorated revetment plaques from the Archaic courtyard complex at Acquarossa (Haynes 2000: 141), illustrated in Fig. 11. The banqueters from Poggio Civitate and Acquarossa are also shown reclining on couches, in a similar manner to the Sarcophagus of the Couple detailed above, and are engaged in drinking to the accompaniment of music, like the banqueters from the Tomb of the Triennium at Tarquinia, dated c.470 BC. From the parity between these images in both funerary and public contexts, one may well be able to conclude that the banqueting scenes in funerary art do reflect elite activities within living society.

Figure 10 Line drawing of one of the revetment plaques showing a banquet from the Archaic Building at Poggio Civitate.
Source: Rathje 2007: 178

Figure 11 One of the revetment plaques showing a banquet from the Archaic courtyard complex at Acquarossa, dated second quarter of the sixth century BC.
Source: Haynes 2000: 140

It is a generally accepted assumption in the scholarship that banquets in funerary art reflect the realm of the living because they represent the funerary feasts undertaken by the relatives of the newly deceased individual as part of burial rites (Pieraccini 2000: 41). A banqueting service of ceramic or precious metal vessels was commonly deposited in the tomb alongside the body. These have been taken to indicate that a feast took place prior to the burial, and that the banqueting service used was then deposited in the grave (Pieraccini 2000: 38). The traces of food that have been found in tombs are often cited as the remnants of burial feasts (Pieraccini 2000: 38). Paintings from the Tomb of the Lionesses from Tarquinia may indicate that these funerary banquets took place outside, under an awning. In the paintings from this tomb (Fig. 9), banqueters are shown reclining and reveling. At the center of the rear wall stands a colossal krater, a vessel used for serving wine. The elements of the painting that evoke a tent are the Tuscan columns at each corner, which are represented as if supporting the vaulted roof, which is painted with a pattern reminiscent of textiles (Holloway 1965: 344). The participants in the painting seem to be aware of their setting within a tent, as one of the banqueters rests his foot against a column (Holloway 1965: 344). This has been taken as evidence that real funerary banquets took place in tents. Other archaeological findings might corroborate the evidence from the funerary art. Post-holes that may have belonged to an ephemeral construction such as an awning have been found at the entrance to a tomb on the Pian della Conserva necropolis near modern Lazio (Spivey 1997: 108). Scholars have interpreted this as evidence of a funerary feasting tent (Spivey 1997: 108). Therefore, the banquets in funerary art represent life as they are representations of the funerary meal that was eaten as part of burial rites.

In addition to this, based on the assumption that the living commissioned funerary monuments for their dead relatives post eventum, post-processual archaeologists such as Parker Pearson have argued that the living manipulated the funerary art of the dead for their own ends (Parker Pearson 2009: 84). According to this school of thought, the living augmented the status of their deceased relations by providing their tomb with banqueting imagery to bolster their own social standing. Prima facie, this argument seems to hold. Banqueting in the manner shown in tomb paintings involved conspicuous consumption, and for that reason, participation in a banquet is often said to have been a status marker for the Etruscan elite (Rathje 2013: 824–5). It seems plausible that a motif such as banqueting, which was connected with elite status, could be employed to enhance prestige in this way. The order of the aristocratically organized Etruscan society would have been threatened with the death of a prominent individual, so an elaborate display of elite status through the medium of funerary art would have allowed the family
which had lost a key member to preserve their position within society (D’Agostino 1989: 1).

An Alternative Perspective

It is unlikely that these banqueting images do not relate to living society in any way. The corroboration between the banqueting motifs seen on sarcophagi and tomb paintings and representations of banquets in non-funerary contexts, as elucidated above, indicates that the scenes cannot be entirely removed from the realm of the living. However, this section argues that these banquets primarily inform us about the realm of the dead. This section will contest that banquets from funerary art represent real life burial feasts, and argue against the notion that the living were capable of achieving their own social goals through manipulation of the images with which they furnished the dead.

There is no verifiable evidence, other than the representations of banqueters on sarcophagi and on the walls of tombs, that banquets took place in honour of the dead at funerals. As explained in the previous chapter, the presence of banqueting services in the grave goods of the deceased has been taken as evidence of funerary banquets, but this assumption can be proven false. For example, the silver banqueting service interred with the sarcophagus of Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa, was so fragile that the original excavator concluded that it could have served no practical function (Ginge 2002: 11). This indicates that Seianti’s grave goods were very likely manufactured specifically for the tomb, and not for a funeral feast taking place at her burial. This example refutes the assumption that all banqueting equipment interred in tombs is indicative of a burial feast. Furthermore, the remains of food found within tombs are also generally assumed to be the leftovers from funerary banquets held by the living, but this is not necessarily the case. It is equally possible that these food items were deposited in the tomb as offerings, perhaps to sustain the deceased in the afterlife (Pieraccini 2000: 41). This evidence casts considerable doubt on the assumption that the banquets illustrated in Etruscan funerary art did reflect those held at funerals in the realm of the living.

The evidence for banquets being set within tented structures is also contentious. The patterned ceilings of many Archaic Etruscan tombs do not necessarily have to be understood as representing awnings. A love of pattern is present in Etruscan art of the Archaic period in general, as seen on many late sixth century engraved bronze mirrors showing scenes from mythology and daily life (e.g. Haynes 2000: Figs. 195-7). This means that the patterned ceilings may be nothing more than pure ornamentation. In addition, the vaulted ceilings themselves, which supposedly recall tents, have also been linked to the sloped roofs of huts from the Villanovan period (c.900-c.720 BC) (Marini 2010: 4). This shows that these roofs might equally be compared to domestic structures. Etruscan tombs are commonly likened to domestic buildings, and tombs are often conceived of in scholarship as houses for the dead (Bonfante 2000: 268), so the interpretation of the vaulted roof as an allusion to domestic architecture may well be more fitting than the comparison to an awning. Moreover, nothing in the remains of the post-hole structure in the Pian della Conserva necropolis indicates that this area was used for banqueting. There could be many other purposes for an ephemeral construction located outside a tomb, perhaps as a shelter (Spivey 1997: 108); it did not necessarily function as a banqueting space.

Moreover, one can argue against the applicability of the post-processual archaeologists’ theory that funerary art could be manipulated by the living to further their own social goals on two grounds. First, it relies on the unfounded assumption that the living were the ones commissioning the sepulchral monuments for their dead relatives and could thus influence the funerary art. It cannot be known whether the individual to be interred in the tomb dictated the form that their funerary art would take, or whether those who outlived the deceased made the choices for their relatives after their deaths (Rowland 2008: 162). However, it seems perfectly plausible that an individual could play a role in commissioning their own tomb prior to their death. It is possible to read the inscriptions on some Etruscan tombs in this way. For example, from the necropolis at Orvieto there are several sixth century BC funerary inscriptions carved on the lintels above the tomb entrance, which read ‘I am the tomb of’, followed by the name of the occupant (Wallace 2008: 137). The usual form of Etruscan mortuary inscriptions was to give the name of the deceased and, if applicable, the person dedicating the funerary monument (Wallace 2008: 136). This is the case with the sixth century BC stele dedicated to Avivle Felushke from Vetulonia. The name of the person who erected the stele, Hirumina, is also engraved on the stone (Wallace 2008: 136). Therefore, it is possible to read into the inscriptions from the two aforementioned tombs from Orvieto that these were commissioned by the occupants, as no other
names are given. However, this is a tenuous conclusion and insufficient evidence to determine that Etruscan tombs were indeed commissioned by the occupants.

Individuals designing their own tombs is known in antiquity. An example, although much later, can be found in Petronius’ Satyricon, when the wealthy freedman Trimalchio describes to his stonemason the images that he would like to adorn his funerary monument (Petronius, Satyricon LXXI). This indicates that a living man deciding the form of his tomb was not an altogether unknown concept in the ancient world, and may well have been an option for the Etruscans.

Additionally, some level of forward planning must have gone into the construction of Etruscan painted tombs as they were dug out of the rock. This, surely, would have been a considerable undertaking, to have commenced before the death of the individual to be buried there. It is unlikely that a tomb would begin to be dug only at the point of an individual’s death, as many months of labour are likely to have been required for the tomb to be carved and decorated, and it would have been desirable for a body to be interred quickly after death. Therefore, it is possible that the theory that tomb art reflects only the concerns of the living, who manipulated the monuments of their relatives for their own ends, is not applicable, as there is a strong likelihood that the person to be interred in the tomb could have had some input into the design and decoration.

The second counter-argument is that for a piece of artwork to function as a status indicator in the manner proposed by the post-processual archaeologists, an audience would be required. For Etruscan funerary art, this would not have been applicable, as tombs were unlikely to be open for regular viewing. Entrances to tombs are usually thought to have been sealed (Izzet 2007: 97). Two examples of this include the tomb of Seianti Hanunia Tiesnasa, which was sealed with two large pan tiles (Ginge 2002: 11), and a Hellenistic period tomb found at Montebello, north of Tarquinia, which was sealed with a limestone slab (Becker, Turfa, and Algee-Hewitt 2009: 90). The wealth of grave goods deposited in very many elite tombs means that they were highly likely to have been sealed, in order to prevent their robbery. Tombs are only thought to have been visited on special occasions, and only a small circle of relations and clergy were permitted to enter (Steingraber 2006: 29). Therefore, there would be little use in the living manipulating the images painted on the walls of the tomb out of a concern for their status in the realm of the living, if there was no audience to acknowledge and ratify their posturing. As for sarcophagi, these were not containers used for the transport of the body to the tomb like a modern coffin, where they might be seen by many onlookers, but were sizable and heavy containers, which were constructed in many pieces (Ginge 2002: 12), meaning that they were only assembled once inside the tomb (Prag 2002: 60). This also indicates that sarcophagi would be unsuitable for the purposes proposed by the post-processual archaeologists’ theory, as they too would not be perceived by a wide audience.

Instead, it was the exterior of tombs that commanded the most attention (Steingraber 2016: 149). The exterior of the tomb was an active and accessible space, as indicated by the external stairs present on many cube tombs, leading to the roof (Steingraber 2016: 148). These are paralleled by the ramps present on many tumuli from the Orientalizing period (c.720-c.580 BC). The tumulus was the predecessor of the cube tomb; it was widespread in the seventh century BC when graves first became monumentalized (Warden 2008, 98). The roofs of both tumuli and cube tombs are usually interpreted as being spaces for memorial rituals (Izzet 2007: 41). This interpretation is confirmed by the presence on an Orientalizing period tumulus near Pisa of a stone altar and a knife with a peculiarly sacrificial blade (Warden 2008: 99). Therefore, it seems the case that the exterior of the tomb that could have communicated with an audience, and not the funerary art within.

Furthermore, this argument is strengthened by comparisons of the banquets in funerary art of the Archaic and Hellenistic periods to the canopic urns of the seventh century. In the Orientalizing period, cinerary urns containing the ashes of the deceased often bore lids in the form of human heads, which were generally intended to represent the person contained within (see Fig.12) (Jannot 2000: 89). In numerous examples from Chiusi, these cinerary urns, which represented the dead, were placed on thrones within the tomb, in front of tables laden with banqueting equipment (Tuck 1994: 622). Additionally, from Tolle near Chiusi, a reclining banqueter is positioned on top of an urn lid dated 630-620 BC (Rathje 2013: 823). As one can observe from Fig.13, the banqueter from the urn is shown in a similar pose to banqueters on Archaic and Hellenistic sarcophagi. In these examples, the deceased person is explicitly conceptualized as a participant in an eternal banquet. This has led scholars to conclude that these banquets
represent action taking place in the realm of the dead, rather than an idealized banquet occurring in the world of the living (Tuck 1994: 622). Elaborate later sarcophagi, such as the Sarcophagus of the Couple and the sarcophagus of Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa, may well be elaborations of the same idea. Both the Orientalizing and later examples were designed to contain the ashes of the deceased. Like the seventh century specimens, the images on the later sarcophagi were very likely intended to represent the dead individual. The sarcophagus of Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa is suggestive of this as the facial reconstruction carried out on the bones contained within has notable similarities to the representation of the banqueter on the lid, more than could be coincidental (Figs. 14-15). (Neave and Prag 2002: 55). Therefore, it is possible that the later sarcophagi were continuations of this earlier tradition. They are highly likely to be representations of the deceased at the eternal banquet in the realm of the dead.

Figure 12 Terracotta canopic urn from Chiusi, dated seventh century BC.

Figure 13 Lid of a cinerary urn from Tomb 23 at Tolle, dated 630-620 BC.
Source: Rathje 2013, 824

Figure 14 The facial reconstruction of Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa, based on an examination of her skull.
Source: Author’s own photograph.

Figure 15 The face of the banqueter on the lid of the terracotta sarcophagus, representing Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa.
Source: Author’s own photograph
Thus far, it has been argued that banquets in funerary art tell us primarily about the realm of the dead, but this is a generic statement. It is possible to add nuance to this conclusion, by arguing that banqueting imagery reflects the realm of the dead by illustrating the hopes of the deceased for the afterlife.

Based on the assumption that it was possible for the occupant of the tomb to make choices about the form of their funerary art prior to their death, the choice of a banqueting motif for tomb imagery might express their desire for continued elite status after death by illustrating a hoped-for afterlife existence (Barker and Rasmussen 2000: 245). Indeed, some individuals were interred alone in tombs that they could have personally commissioned, such as Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa (Ginge 2002: 13) and the two examples from Orvieto whose inscriptions were referenced above (Warden 2008: 137). However, the dead were not only entombed individually. In the Hellenistic period, multiple burials within the same tomb were the norm (Ginge 2002: 14). There could be up to seventy burials per tomb (Steingraber 2016: 153), with tombs being reopened to deposit new remains (Pieraccini 2000: 37). **Fig.16** illustrates just how crowded these late tombs could be. Yet the conclusion that tomb paintings may express wishes for the afterlife does still hold for these chambers with multiple burials. This is demonstrated by the example of the fourth century BC Tomb of the Shields from Tarquinia, which held the remains of the Velcha family. Paintings of the family members, which are labeled with their names, adorn the walls (Steingraber 2006: 188). Several generations of the family are present, reclining on klinai as banqueters, as shown in **Fig.17**. The later generations are represented on the walls with their deceased ancestors, symbolically reuniting with them in the painting, as well as physically reuniting with them by sharing the same tomb space. Consequently, banquets could be seen as expressing the hope for a reunion of the family in the afterlife and ancestral continuity (Scheffer 1994: 202). The theme of reuniting is seen elsewhere in Etruscan funerary art, for example in the fourth century BC sarcophagus of Arnth Tetnies and Ramtha Vishnai from Vulci, illustrated in **Fig.18**. On the long side of the sarcophagus, the reunion between the two figures is shown. The travelling staff held by Arnth Tetnies might reflect his journey to be reunited with his wife (Rowland 2008: 115).
The tomb paintings, therefore, can be read as being applicable to the afterlife existence of all of the occupants of the tomb, whereas sarcophagi, which were intended for use by one or two individuals, could be more personal. The images of the banqueter on the lid could be personalised with the likeness of the occupant, as was the case with Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa, or by the addition of a name inscription, as was the case with Larthia Seianti (Ginge 2002, 14). However, the majority of sarcophagi were decorated with stock themes. All complex terracotta sarcophagi like that of Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa are thought to be unique as removing the finished product from the mould in the manufacturing process would have likely required the mould to be broken (Prag 2002, 63), but the general choices of subject matter employed are very similar. For instance, sarcophagi from Chiusi are commonly decorated with the Etruscan version of the Greek hero Echetlos, who holds a plough (Bonfante 2000: 272). The employment of personalized versions of generic themes in this manner may indicate a desire on the part of the occupants to define their position as part of an elite group and perpetuate this status when they entered the realm of the dead.

**Conclusion**

In summary, this article argues that while the images of banqueters from tombs cannot be wholly removed from the realm of the living, these scenes primarily inform us about the realm of the dead. Considerable doubt has been cast on the assumption that the scenes from funerary art illustrate real-life burial feasts, and it has instead been proposed that the images shown in tomb paintings and on sarcophagi are representations of the deceased banqueting in the afterlife, through comparisons to earlier examples. By showing that tomb interiors where funerary art was found were not readily accessible places, and that the occupants of tombs could have had a role in commissioning their funerary monuments prior to their death, this article has refuted the post-processual archaeologists’ theory that the living manipulated the images of the dead for their own ends.

By representing themselves as participants in an eternal banquet, set in the realm of the dead, the Etruscans illustrate their hopes for reunification with their ancestors and the continuation of perpetual elite status in the afterlife.

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