REDISCOVERING THE ETRUSCANS: ETRUSCAN ELEMENTS IN LATE NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTING

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Situated within the framework of Classical reception studies, this article examines examples of Etruscan motifs in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European academic paintings, challenging the conventional emphasis on Greco-Roman classicism in the history of art. The analysis of artworks by Kristian Zahrtmann, Aleksandr Svedomsky, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, John William Godward, and Edward John Poynter reveals a subtle yet significant incorporation of Etruscan imagery. This research examines how these artists engaged with Etruscan motifs, either intentionally or inadvertently, and challenges the historiographical bias that has marginalised Etruscan contributions in the study of Classical reception. It advocates for a more inclusive understanding of ancient cultural influences in nineteenth and twentieth-century art.

Keywords: Etruscan art; academic painting; Classical reception; Zartmann; Svedomsky; Alma-Tadema, Godward; Poynter.

Introduction

Situated within the framework of Classical reception studies, this article explores the depictions of Etruscan motifs in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European academic painting. While this era is often associated with its fascination for ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, it also engaged with the artistic heritage of the Etruscans. Sometimes these engagements were intentional, but at other times they were accidental or erroneous. During the nineteenth century, archaeological excavations across Italy unearthed numerous Etruscan artefacts and tomb complexes, sparking both scholarly and artistic interest. Major discoveries like the Tomb of the Reliefs at Cerveteri (1847) and the systematic documentation of Tarquinian tomb paintings contributed to the wider circulation of Etruscan visual material available within artistic circles. The results of these archaeological finds were disseminated through publications such as George Dennis's *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (1848) and the ambitious *I Rilievi delle Urne Etrusche,* begun by Heinrich (Enrico) Brunn (first volume, 1870) and completed by his student Gustav Körte (third volume, 1916). Artists of this period accessed Etruscan material through multiple channels: the growing collections at the British Museum

and the Vatican's *Museo Gregoriano Etrusco*, archaeological publications, and, in some cases, direct observation of sites in Italy.

Through the analysis of selected artworks by Kristian Zahrtmann, Aleksandr Svedomsky, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, John William Godward and Edward John Poynter, this article traces the subtle but consequential presence of Etruscan imagery and investigates how it figures across the corpus. Their works reveal both careful study of recognisable Etruscan elements and occasional misattributions that reflect the period's evolving understanding of ancient Italian art.

Greco-Roman antiquity remained a dominant reference point for academic painting in this period. The rediscovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the eighteenth century catalysed a revival of interest in Classical antiquity that permeated various aspects of culture, from literature and visual arts to architecture and fashion. However, our understanding of this Classical revival has been shaped by later scholarship that considered Etruscan art as inferior to that of Greek art. In the case of painted pottery, vases long discussed under the rubric of 'Etruscan' were already being recognised as Greek manufacture by the later eighteenth century, a shift that contributed to the subsequent copy/original discourse surrounding Etruscan art (Izzet 2007:232).

In the twentieth century, the attributional method and connoisseurship of Sir John Beazley (1885–1970) further consolidated the comparative habit of treating Attic vase-painting as the benchmark against which objects from Etruscan and other non-Greek Italic cultures were evaluated (Izzet 2007:224–225). Osborne (2001:277–278) observes that large quantities of Athenian painted pottery reached Etruria, where it was keenly acquired, and in some instances Athenian workshops even produced forms 'made specially for the Etruscan market'.

Against this intellectual climate, a framework had developed by the mid-twentieth century in which influential scholarship cast Etruscan art as derivative and inferior to Greek achievements. John Boardman, for example, presents Etruscan art as revealing 'the effect of Greek art ... on a relatively primitive people' (Boardman 1967:155), and criticises the excess of attention it received during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This article addresses the persistence of such evaluative hierarchies by tracing how specific Etruscan objects, motifs and forms were incorporated by artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In doing so, it contributes to scholarship on Classical reception by documenting and interpreting a small corpus of paintings in which 'antiquity' is constructed not only through a Greco-Roman lens but also through the selective incorporation of Etruscan material.

Background

In stark contrast to the abundant Greek and Roman literary record, our understanding of Etruscan religion and society must be reconstructed largely from material and visual evidence, since the surviving Etruscan textual corpus is fragmentary and limited. Their preference for using materials that quickly deteriorated, such as folded linen 'books', makes it difficult to analyse Etruscan literature directly (Turfa 2013:2). The extant texts lean towards technical material, such as the *Liber Linteus Zagrebiensis,* which was preserved as mummy wrappings and appears to be a form of ritual calendar (Agostiniani 2013:461). Other texts, like the Tabula Capuana and gold Pyrgi tablets, provide insights into rituals and legal agreements (Schmitz 1995:560; Wallace 2016:210). Funerary inscriptions can reveal family connections, while the bronze Liver of Piacenza assisted with haruspicy by listing divine names (Bonfante 2006:10). The inscriptions on bronze mirrors found in the *Corpus speculorum Etruscorum* aid in identifying mythological figures. Krauskopf (2013:513–515) identifies two other sources for understanding Etruscan religion. Fragmented literary sources, including Roman accounts, shed light on divination practices but these need careful interpretation for the conqueror's bias (Bundrick 2019:51). Material culture, on the other hand, provides substantial information involving the study and interpretation of iconography.

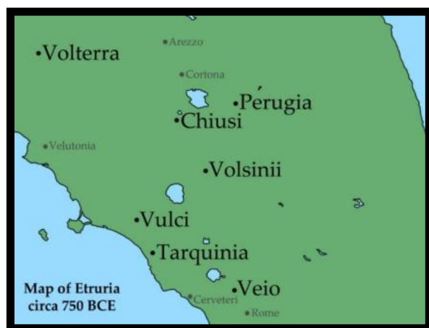

Figure 1

Beyond these textual and material sources, fundamental questions about the Etruscans, such as their very origins, have intrigued scholars. Herodotus (1.94.5–7) first proposed a Lydian immigration, an idea contested by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 1.30), who instead suggested an autochthonic origin. Genetic research indicates a native northern Italian origin with shared traits among Italic groups (Posth *et al.* 2021 *passim*). Etruscan influence extended across Etruria's geographical bounds – the Tyrrhenian coast, Apennine mountains, the Arno and Tiber rivers – forming the Etruscan League of archaic times (Fig. 1).[1] Their power reached Rome and the Adriatic colonies, evolving from the Villanovan culture to Etruscan by the seventh century BCE. The

[1] All of the details concerning the authorship and source information for each of the figures referenced in this article are catalogued under the list of figures, which can be consulted at the end of the article, before the bibliography.

rise of the Roman Republic marked the gradual erosion of the Etruscan League from the later fourth century BCE to its final collapse in the third century BCE (Ceccarelli 2016:29). Romanisation and Etruscanisation intertwined, as seen in shared mythological and cultural language. While the relationship between Rome and Etruria was characterised by cultural interchange, equally significant was the Etruscan interaction with Greek culture. Greek contact through colonies and settlements introduced art and myths, leading to a complex relationship between Greek and Etruscan art.

On the era of European academic painting, it is important to note that the Etruscans entered the nineteenth-century imagination not only as an academic subject but also through travel writing, collecting practices and museum displays. Francesca Orestano (2023:23) notes that, for Victorians, the Etruscans were enveloped in a 'perplexing halo of mixed uncertainty'. In related terms, Michael Vickers (1986:154) remarks on the Etruscans' malleable position within the modern historical imagination, where they could be framed alternatively as at times 'Westerners, through and through, at others as exotic orientals'. Taken together, these observations help explain why Etruscan motifs in academic painting appealed to artists as an area ripe for exploration.

Analyses of individual artworks

Because the labelling of iconographical elements within artworks is seldom indexed as such in museum catalogues and art-historical databases, this study could not be conducted through keyword searching alone. The paintings discussed here were therefore located through a broad visual survey of digitised catalogues and online collections for artists producing reconstructions of the ancient Mediterranean, with particular attention to scenes in which objects are rendered with sufficient detail to permit identification. Works were selected for close analysis only where at least one depicted artefact, motif, or architectural feature could be correlated with Etruscan material culture and supported through *comparanda* in archaeological corpora or museum holdings. The resulting corpus does not claim to be exhaustive, but rather to demonstrate, through securely grounded examples, some of the mechanisms by which Etruscan objects and aesthetics became available for pictorial incorporation in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century academic imaginings of antiquity.

En etrurer (1908) by Kristian Zahrtmann

Kristian Zahrtmann (1843–1917) stands as a significant figure in the annals of Danish art, leaving an indelible mark around the turn of the twentieth century through his revolutionary use of vibrant colours. He was an instructor at the

Kunstnernes Frie Studieskoler in Copenhagen, an institution that challenged the traditional curriculum of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (Wolthers 2011:142). Zahrtmann painted several mythological and historical paintings, such as *Prometheus and the Eagle* (1906) and *Socrates and Alcibiades* (1911).

He appeared to have a deep interest in portraying craftsmen and artisans, as seen in his 1886 painting, *A Roman Plasterer*, and the one this article will focus on, *An Etruscan* (1908) (Fig. 2), pictured on the left. The image pictured on the right (Fig. 3) is an Etruscan cinerary urn, discussed further below.

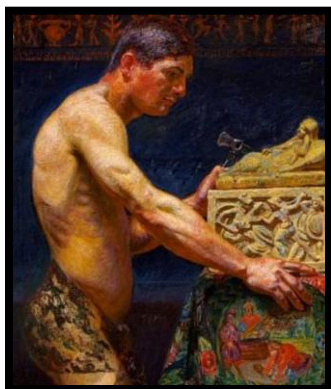

Figure 2

Figure 3

This colourful painting shows a male artisan with a loincloth wrapped around his hips. A hammer can be seen in his left hand as he surveys his nearly completed work of a cinerary urn. Numerous Etruscan cinerary urns survive from the *necropoli* and tombs found from northern Volterra to the more southern Tarquinia near Rome. Unlike sarcophagi, cinerary urns were intended to hold the deceased person's cremated remains; they evolved from terracotta vases in the prior Villanovan and Archaic periods. The urn in the painting shows a motif referred to as 'the hero with a plough'. The central male figure, who gives the composition its name, is portrayed from behind, wearing only a waist sash. He holds a ploughshare and is about to strike a fallen enemy's head. The source of the myth or narrative behind this image remains unknown. It is plausible that the Etruscans combined or misattributed the tale of Echetlus, an enigmatic peasant hero involved in the Battle of Marathon (Bonfante and Bonfante 2002:30), with another Echetlus. Pausanias (1.32.5) describes Echetlus as having 'slaughtered many of the foreigners with a plough' (Jones 1918:175). Another figure named Echetlus is briefly mentioned in Statius' *Thebaid* (10.314) as one of the soldiers who perished in the battle of the

Seven against Thebes. Given the Etruscans' inclination for adorning their funerary art with narratives from the Theban Cycle, it is conceivable that these two distinct individuals became intertwined in the oral history passed down to Etruria.

While the iconography reveals possible Greek mythological influences, equally significant is the painting's representation of Etruscan artistic techniques. The artisan's work was described above as 'nearly completed' because cinerary urns of the Etruscans were often brightly painted, particularly the terracotta cinerary urns from Chiusi from the second and first centuries BCE (Fig. 3). An interesting question at this point is, was Zahrtmann aware of this? There is no evidence of him travelling to Italy to see such objects in person, so it could be that Zahrtmann was only aware of this sort of sculpture through books and catalogues, which were rarely furnished with full colour plate illustrations. An example of such a book available at the time is George Dennis' two-volume *The cities and cemeteries of Etruria*, first published in 1848. While Dennis' books are exquisitely illustrated and have been seminal works on Etruscan art for many years, he spends little time on cinerary urns and has almost no illustrations of them. This may be because he was aware of the catalogue being compiled by Brunn and Körte, entitled *I rilievi delle urne Etrusche* (1870–1916). However, Körte's Volume III, which is the volume that examines this ploughshare hero motif, was only published in 1916, well after the creation of this painting and shortly before Zahrtmann's death. Given the artist's love of vibrant colours, it is difficult to imagine that Zahrtmann would have missed an opportunity to show off the bright polychromy of Etruscan art if he had been aware of it.

Ворота в городе Вольтерра, Этрурия (1884) by Aleksandr Svedomsky

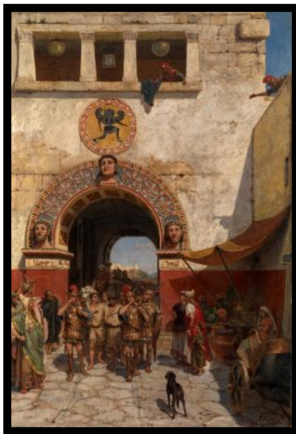

Figure 4

Aleksandr Svedomsky (1848–1911), about whom little is known, was a Russian painter who saw Etruscan art firsthand. He lived in Rome from 1875 with his younger brother Pavel Svedomsky. While Pavel's work was primarily figurative and placed well within the genre of history painting, Aleksandr was generally known as a landscape painter. The figures that do appear in his artworks are almost decorative, or if they have any purpose, it is to furnish the landscape within a concrete period. This is seen in Svedomsky's 1884 work, *Ворота в городе Вольтерра, Этрурия*, translated as *The gates of the city of Volterra, Etruria* (Fig. 4). While there is a minor narrative, that of the triumphant

Volterran soldiers returning with captives, it is a mere shadow compared to the architecture and sculptural elements present.

Turning attention to the upper part of the painting, four square columns with painted capitals are visible (Fig. 5, cropped from Fig. 4). These capitals are quite unusual but can be found in painted tombs throughout Etruria, such as the ones in *Tomba dei Rilievi* (Tomb of the Reliefs) in the Banditaccia Necropolis.

Figure 5

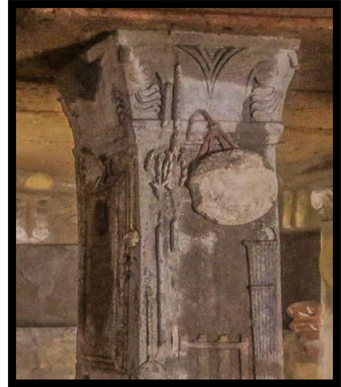

Figure 6

Figure 7

The Banditaccia Necropolis is situated in Cerveteri and dates to the fourth century BCE (Fig. 6). As the name suggests, the tomb is famous for its many relief sculptures of tools and other daily necessities carved into the walls and onto the columns. This style of column capital is related to the Proto-Aeolic order from the Levant and travelled across the Mediterranean with Phoenician colonists. In Greece, this evolved into the Aeolic order, which closely resembles the Ionic except that the volutes sprout vertically instead of resting horizontally (Boardman 1993:44). The capitals used in Etruscan tombs are an evolutionary branch of their own, with less emphasis placed on the curl of the volutes and with other wave-like decorations taking up the spaces to the side of the volute stem. While there is at least one example of a similar column capital depicted on an Etruscan mirror now in the Detroit Institute of Art (Inv. No. 47.399;

Caccioli 2009:39), they are rarely seen outside of funerary architecture. Given that the Svedomsky brothers resided in Italy, it is likely that Aleksandr went to see the Etruscan tombs for himself, the Tomb of the Reliefs having been rediscovered some four decades previously, in 1847.

Figure 8

Although Svedomsky's primary focus was architectural detail, his attention to historical accuracy extended to the human figures as well. An examination of the triumphant returning soldiers making their way through the city gate, reveals another curious parallel (Fig. 7, Cropped from Fig. 4). Scholars of Roman art may recognise the soldier's use of the *cornu*, a curved trumpet invented by the Etruscans and adopted by the Romans for processions and military signalling (Alexandrescu 2007:39). Turning to the man's armour, it is clear to see the influence of the suit of armour worn by the so-called *Mars of Todi*, a bronze statue of a young warrior cast in the last fifth or early fourth century BCE (Brendel 1978:316) (Fig. 8, next page). He wears a lamellar plate armour (to which the painter has added bronze greaves), and a helmet inspired by the south Italian Chaldean type.

The sculpture (Fig. 8) was acquired by the Vatican's *Museo Gregoriano Etrusco*, then newly founded in 1837, and the similarities between the armour and

Figure 9

Figure 10

pose of the two figures strongly suggest that Svedomsky had access to the Etruscan original to study and sketch from. The distinctive tondo-like element of the Gorgon set on the wall is also noteworthy (Fig. 9, cropped from Fig. 4). The author is aware of no such plaque in Etruscan art. However, this Gorgon is remarkably like the ones that pursue Perseus on the Dinos of the Gorgon Painter (Fig. 10). This Attic black-figure vase provides a perfect example of how artists' understanding of Etruscan art was shaped by the archaeological knowledge of their time. While the vase was discovered in Etruria, it was only through the work of Sir John Beazley (born just one year after Svedomsky's painting was completed) that the painter of this vase was identified. The vase was confirmed to be of Athenian manufacture, imported to Etruria and subsequently placed in an Etruscan tomb.

At the time when Svedomsky was working, this vase was still assumed to have been of Etruscan manufacture. Thus, he used it as an emblematic element of the Volterran city.

Etruscan Vase Painters (1871) by Lawrence Alma-Tadema

Like Svedomsky's Gorgon, another example of misattribution of Greek art as Etruscan can be found in a work by the British artist Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema.

Figure 11

Alma-Tadema was part of a core group of what are known as British Academy painters, all associated with the Royal Academy of Art in London. They all, to greater or lesser degrees, interacted with the renewed interest in the ancient world during this period, seeing themselves as spiritual heirs of the French tradition of Neo-Classicism. However, instead of great battles or epic myths, the British Academy painters (or Neo-Pompeiians, as they are sometimes referred to) focused more on genre scenes, that is, scenes of everyday life, reconstructed as best they could. Born in the Netherlands and trained in Belgium, Alma-Tadema was initially interested in painting Medieval history and focused on the Merovingian Dynasty of the Franks (Barrow 2001:21). However, his work in that niche era was not popular. He saw more success with several Egyptian-themed paintings before moving to depictions of Ancient Rome.

The painting titled *Etruscan Vase Painters* (1871) (Fig. 11) shows artists within a workshop; the central figure leans back to contemplate her painting on a red-figured lekythos, perhaps comparing it to the sketch nearby on the table. The tiny figure she has painted (Fig. 12, cropped from Fig. 11) appears to be sitting on a

Figure 12

Figure 13

stool, wings behind him, dressed only in lavish body jewellery picked out in white highlights. This figure is recognisable as Eros, painted in the Apulian style of vase painting. Apulia was a Greek colony in Southern Italy, stretching over what we now consider to be the heel of the boot of Italy. In Apulian vase painting, these *erote* figures abound, often on their own but more often acting as attendants to Aphrodite or witnesses to toilet or wedding scenes. The Apulian Eros (Fig. 13) is well-known for his androgyny, having apparent male genitalia and presenting himself in the nude but otherwise bedecked in a feminine manner with bracelets, anklets, body harnesses, necklaces, earrings, and diadems. At the same time, his hair is always worn bound up in a feminine style. It is very clear to scholars now that such *erotes* are not Etruscan, and Alma-Tadema was well-known for his meticulous research of references for his works, travelling to Italy several times, even visiting the recently re-opened excavations of Pompeii to take sketches of the architecture and art (Barrow 2001:28).

This apparent mistake reveals how even the most thorough artists were constrained by the archaeological knowledge of their time, when Apulian vases found in Etruscan tombs were commonly assumed to be of Etruscan manufacture.

Interior of Caius Marcius' House (1901) by Lawrence Alma-Tadema

This attention to detail and historical accuracy is equally apparent in the watercolour paintings that Alma-Tadema produced at the request of Henry Irving for a production of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (Fig. 14; Gillard-Estrada 2014:17, Barrow 2001:166). The play is set just after the expulsion of the Etruscan Tarquinian kings and Alma-Tadema has taken great pains to seamlessly integrate Etruscan elements into the home of this famous general of the early Roman Republic.

Figure 14

For most viewers unfamiliar with Etruscan architecture and art, this may appear to be a plausible reconstruction of an early Roman home; however, a closer examination reveals deliberate incorporation of Etruscan elements in the finer details. Thinking back a moment to the earlier painting of the city gates of Volterra by Svedomsky, one might notice that the Aeolic order capitals atop the columns that surround the garden peristyle (Fig. 15, cropped from Fig. 14) are the same ones seen earlier from the Tomb of the Reliefs.

Figure 15

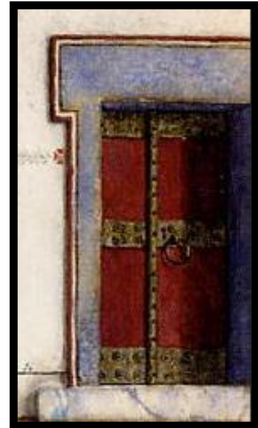

Figure 16

To the right of the peristyle is a red door framed with a thick blue mould edging in a T shape (Fig. 16, cropped from Fig. 14). False doors like these are commonly found in Etruscan tombs, the most notable being the *Tomba degli Auguri* (Tomb of the Augurs) (Fig. 17) and the *Tomba dei Caronti* (Tomb of the Charuns) (Fig. 18). These doors also appear on Etruscan sarcophagi and cinerary urns, most often in scenes where the deceased is guided by Vanth, an Etruscan daemon, to the City of the Dead. Whether or not this style of door was used outside of the funerary context is difficult to determine because little domestic Etruscan architecture remains.

Figure 17

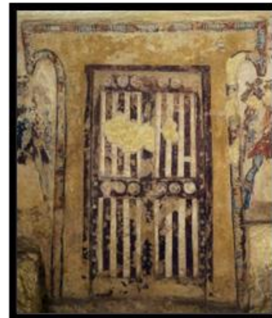

Figure 18

A third Etruscan element comes in the form of Alma-Tadema's tiny renditions (Fig. 19, cropped from Fig. 14) of a portion of the frescoes found in the *Tomba del Barone* (Tomb of the Baron) in Tarquinia (Fig. 20).

Figure 19

Figure 20

The tomb, dated to the sixth century BC E (Steingräber 2006:96–97), is one of the most abundantly painted tombs within the necropolis. From its decorative programme, Alma-Tadema has selected this small scene of an older, bearded man accompanied by a young pipe player, offering a wine cup to a woman. The woman's hair is bound up in a *tutulus* style, another element of Etruscan culture that the Romans adopted to become associated with the hairstyle of the *flaminica dialis* (Siebert 2006: *passim*). Through these architectural features, painted decorations, and costume details, Alma-Tadema created a setting that acknowledges the Etruscan influence on early Roman domestic space.

Ione (c. 1896) by John William Godward

While the previous artists incorporated multiple Etruscan elements into their historical reconstructions, occasionally the influence of Etruscan art appears in a single, carefully studied detail. In a painting by John William Godward (1861–1922) (Fig. 21), the viewer is struck by his lush, sensuous style, both in the sheerness of the woman's drapery and in the magnificent rendering of veined marble, for which this artist is considered an expert. This English painter was prolific but ill-timed, having come onto the Academic scene in its twilight years and never gaining the same recognition as others of the group like Alma-Tadema, Lord Leighton, or Poynter. His portraits of young women broke from the tradition of using idealised features found in Classical art, keeping close to the likeness of his models but transferring them from their contemporary context into an ancient one, notably the setting of Pompeii (Barrow 2011:2).

The painting is titled *Ione*, and one might expect a mythological scene given that the painting's namesake is one of the fifty Nereid daughters of Nereus and Doris, Greek deities of the ocean. However, one finds instead a domestic setting: a

Figure 21

Figure 22

Figure 23

young woman inspecting her appearance in a hand-held bronze mirror (Fig. 22, cropped from Fig. 21). While the Greeks and Romans used mirrors, the Etruscans adored them: over three thousand mirrors have been discovered across Etruria, many of which are now catalogued in the *Corpus speculorum Etruscorum* (Bonfante 2015:375). The engraved backs of the mirrors are highly informative for studying Etruscan daily life, culture, and belief systems, comparable to the role of Greek vases in understanding Greek civilisation. The mirrors had multifaceted roles; they were not merely decorative but possessed

significant symbolic, even magical, value. They were seen as enabling communication with divine realms (Bonfante 2015:398).

While the specific mirror that Godward may have used as his reference for this painting has not been identified, the handles of most Etruscan mirrors have a distinctive shape. The curved shape features a narrow pinch that then flares out, presumably to make the heavy bronze mirror easier to hold. This can be seen on a mirror created in the third century BCE (Fig. 23). The mirror depicts the Titan Prometheus chained in punishment for bringing fire to mortals, and surrounded by Asclepius, Athena and the hero Herakles, who will free him from his bondage. Since mirrors such as these are scattered in museums worldwide – the British Museum having at least a hundred in its collection – Godward had ample opportunity to study these Etruscan objects firsthand. His careful attention to the mirror's distinctive form demonstrates how artists could accurately incorporate Etruscan elements when they had direct access to well-documented artefacts.

The Ides of March (c. 1883) by Edward John Poynter

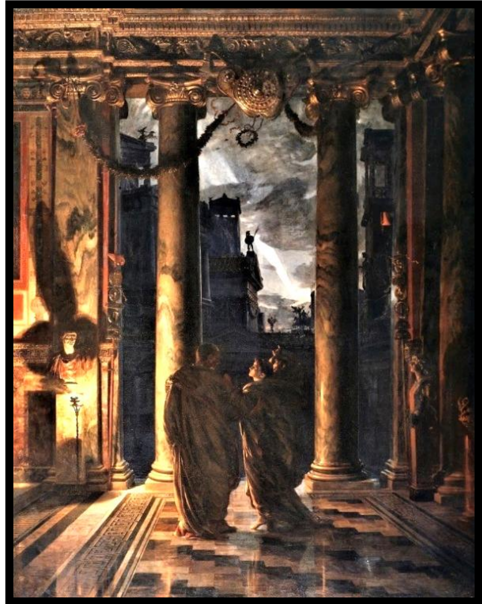

Figure 24

Lastly, one of the subtlest incorporations of Etruscan elements appears in a work by Sir Edward John Poynter (1836–1919), who was both an artist and a scholar, serving not only as the inaugural Slade Professor at University College, London (1871–1875) but also the President of the Royal Academy of Art (1896–1918) and Director of the National Gallery in London (1894–1904). Considered 'one of the great Victorian polymaths' (Inglis 2010), Poynter was deeply interested in the ancient world, particularly its metalwork and coins, the study of which he applied to designing contemporary coins and medals for various organisations. His attention to the less revered 'decorative arts' informs his paintings and comes across clearly in this 1883 work entitled *The Ides of March* (Fig. 24).
The Ides of March have come to signify the date on which Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BCE. This painting depicts what is perhaps the night before or

early morning of the *Ides,* when it was still dark enough to clearly see the great comet (C/−43 K1) that was visible in that year. Virgil (*Georg.* 1.488) implies that comets were part of a collection of devastating omens that warned of great catastrophe upon the death of Caesar. Omens and divination are likewise deeply woven into Etruscan religious practice.

In the painting, above the comet at the apex of the vast door frame, is a collection of shields affixed to the wall (Fig. 25, cropped from Fig. 24). The two oblong shields to either side are of the Gallic style, perhaps based on the Celtic Battersea shield to represent Caesar's wars in Gaul. However, the central round shield is Etruscan. Such a shield can be seen with the distinctive concentric circles

Figure 25

Figure 26

(Fig. 26) which mark this type of shield as similar in construction, but different in decoration from the Greek *aspis* or hoplite shield. The size, vast weight, and highly decorative finish of such shields suggest that they were not intended for combat but for processional displays or as a funerary shield for the walls of a tomb. Artistic examples can be seen in the *Tomba degli Scudi* (Tomb of the Shields) in Tarquinia. The purpose of such Etruscan funerary shields is not fully understood. However, they are generally considered to have served a protective role for the deceased within the tomb (Turnure 1965:45). Poynter's precise inclusion of this shield type, alongside accurately rendered Celtic examples, demonstrates a deep knowledge of Etruscan material culture.

Bias and Etruscan visibility

The Etruscans faced two periods of relative scholarly marginalisation: from late antiquity to the Renaissance and then again during the mid–twentieth century when they fell out of favour in ancient art history scholarship. One factor for this is the comparative framing found in influential surveys by scholars such as John Boardman and Sir John Beazley, where Etruscan material is evaluated primarily in

relation to Greek art and thereby positioned as inferior rather than as an artistic tradition with its own priorities. Boardman (1967:155) makes this explicit when he says that Etruscan art 'has attracted far more attention than it deserves, and it earns a place in this book ... [only] for the revealing contrast it affords to the achievements of the Greeks'. Such evaluative language exemplifies a comparative hierarchy that shaped teaching and research priorities, with Etruscan culture and art frequently positioned as derivative or explanatory rather than as an object of study. Jean Turfa describes how this bias, formed in education, could predispose researchers to this perspective:

> …all too many scholars may have been influenced by the Victorian schoolboy phenomenon: trained in the Classical heritage, perhaps even in Latin and Greek, they know, from the Classical historians like Herodotus and Livy, that Etruscans were the Others, the enemies, the implacable foes and despots like the Tarquins... (Turfa 2013:1).

Against this historiographical backdrop, the paintings examined here suggest a more complex engagement with Etruscan antiquity in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century academic art than later disciplinary summaries sometimes imply. Close reading indicates a tangible awareness of Etruscan material culture and a willingness to incorporate Etruscan forms and motifs into reconstructions of ancient Italy, even where later scholarship has revised attributions or identifications.

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