

Scritti per il decimo anniversario di Aristonothos

a cura di Enrico Giovanelli

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Scritti per il Mediterraneo antico

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Questa serie vuole celebrare il mare Mediterraneo e contribuire a sviluppare temi, studi e immaginario che il cratere firmato dal greco Aristonothos ancora oggi evoca. Deposito nella tomba di un etrusco, racconta di storie e relazioni fra culture diverse che si svolgono in questo mare e sulle terre che unisce.

“Allora è vero quanto ripeteva, se non erro, Archita di Taranto [...]:
‘Se un uomo salisse in cielo e contemplasse
la natura dell’universo e la bellezza degli
astri, la meraviglia di tale visione non
gli darebbe la gioia più intensa, come dovrebbe,
ma quasi un dispiacere, perché non avrebbe
nessuno a cui comunicarla’.
Così la natura non ama affatto l’isolamento e cerca sempre
di appoggiarsi, per così dire, a un sostegno,
che è tanto più dolce quanto più è caro l’amico.”

Con questa frase di Cicerone nel *De Amicitia* (XXIII, 88)
vi ringraziamo tutti per aver voluto celebrare
con i vostri scritti il decimo anniversario di Aristonothos!

Federica Cordano, Giovanna Bagnasco Gianni

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BETWIXT DAWN AND DUSK.
THE ETRUSCAN MOTIF OF HERCLE SAILING ON AN AMPHORA RAFT

Ingela M.B. Wiman, Ulf R. Hansson

*Sperai vicino il lido
credei calmato il vento
ma trasportar mi sento
fra le tempeste ancor.*

*E da uno scoglio infido
mentre salvar mi voglio
urto in un altro scoglio
del primo assai peggior.*

Antonio Pietro Metastasio

Introduction

Like satyrs and centaurs, neither man nor animal, images are liminal entities in the realm “betwixt and between” reality and illusion, to use the famous words by Victor Turner¹. Etruscan mirrors have two sides, one reflecting, and one narrative of kinds. Plato discussed the problem of how “narrative arts” distort the truth². Reflected images are even more illusive, as implied in St. Paul’s metaphor of mirrors as an image of an image of reality³. Mirrors *per se*, intriguing and enigmatic,

¹ TURNER 1967, pp. 93-111.

² Entire parts of the *Symposium* deals with narrations, stories in stories told by one who recalls a second narrator who in his turn refers to a third, see the interesting discussion of Plato and his ideas of narrative art in GLAZOV – CORRIGAN 2006, pp. 7-42.

³ *Ad Cor.* 13:12, *Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate...*

have fascinated mankind throughout time. Lucretius' words capture the miracle that; "*rem contra speculum ponas, apparet imago*". His explanation is that objects are obstructed by the compact or shining surfaces and thus reflected, just like the rays of the sun (*Luc.* 4.150-167). Mirrors have even been discussed in philosophical texts because of the intriguing question why they reverse left and right but not up/down⁴. Therefore, mirrors were seen as mysterious in antiquity. The Etruscans are credited with having come up with the idea of furnishing the non-reflective side of a bronze mirror with engraved drawings. The contents of these engraved images are often fairly straightforward to interpret, since many of them carry inscriptions naming the characters present. These images as well as Etruscan names inscribed on vases provide a kind of figured bilinguals, discussed by de Simone in *ANRW*⁵. Images on mirrors thus display a double liminality, providing a perfect arena for ambiguous and playful references.

Historically, the two major defining factors of the study of Etruscan art, and especially the field of iconology or the interpretation of intrinsic meaning, have been the absence of indigenous literary sources coupled with an often unbalanced Greco-centrism on the part of scholars⁶. In recent years, however, there have been a number of contributions where Etruscan art is viewed as cognitive information in its own right. These have had the positive effect to force us to partially rethink the idea of artistic dependency and creativity in the Etrusco-Italic world. Etruria was not a passive receiver of cultural goods from Greece or Asia Minor but reshaped and used these goods to its own purposes and conditions⁷. It is, possibly, more pertinent to consider, for instance, the idea of local élites and their entourage of both sexes, including slaves avarious genus, as being parts of an interregional exchange system. The exchanges could be consequences of trade and transhumance contributing to knowledge and directly transferred technologies, or indirect by means of crafted products, like woven tapestries, cloths or other textiles communicating belief systems and images from a traditionally more feminine sphere. Such transmittance is important to discuss in the light of new biomedical techniques aim-

⁴ BLOCK 1974 gives a comprehensive view of the discussion and the explanation.

⁵ DE SIMONE 1972, pp. 490-521.

⁶ RIDGWAY 2002, pp. 21-25.

⁷ Cf. GAZDA 2002.

ing at tracing migrations and ancestry⁸. Culture change often results from step-by-step infiltration, more seldom from war or invasions. In such a system any artistic language might have been regarded as a common asset that each member was free to use and shape according to own needs⁹. Even though Etruscan artists made use of Greek prototypes, copying these more or less faithfully, the potential of detecting a specific Etruscan idiom, speaking, as it were, through these images, should not be underestimated¹⁰. Etruscan artists often favoured illustrations of narratives or scenes that were less popular or unattested in Greek art¹¹. Where engraved gems are concerned, for example, the motif of Herakles/*Hercle and the Hind* seems to have been much more popular in Etruria than it ever was in Greece.

The aim of the present paper is to suggest some possible means for identifying and analysing some aspects of an Etruscan iconological idiom. It addresses this question in a discussion of a motif labelled *Hercle on an Amphora Raft*¹². It shows a male figure seated or reclining on a raft supported by amphorae. The most detailed image, on a mirror extension, shows him with a lion-skin set as a sail, navigating on a raft consisting of a platform kept afloat by a set of amphorae tied together with ropes¹³. The figure holds a club in his upraised right hand and a bow in his likewise upraised, left hand. He is depicted nude, seated on the raft with his left leg bent. Nothing of his lower legs or feet is visible (cfr. fig. 1). An inscribed label above the figure's head

⁸ Perkins has analysed results from DNA studies up to 2009. His conclusion is "...mtDNA indicates the mobility of childbearing females across the Mediterranean. In the absence of any evidence to support the Herodotean account of mass immigration to central Italy, we must now accept the immigration of individuals or small groups of females...": PERKINS 2009, 108; see also TASSI *et Alii* 2013, pp. 11-18.

⁹ E.G. IZZET, 2008; DE GRUMMOND 2006; SCHEFFER 1994, with an interesting attempt to distinguish between Greek and Etruscan; see also SPERBER's 1985, pp. 39-67 interesting discussion on "relativism" in descriptions of cultural contacts.

¹⁰ "Reading" pictures, naturally, involves a process of transforming imagery into text hence the metaphor.

¹¹ KRAUSKOPF 1996; cfr. the discussion on *ES*, III, 159-161 catalogue entry for mirror CLXVII.

¹² For a discussion of this motif, e.g. STIGLITZ 1959; HANSSON 2002.

¹³ On some gem devices, *Hercle* uses his club as rudder. E.g. HANSSON 2005, pl. 1:1, 4.

reads *Hercle*. So, the identity of this figure is undisputed from the combination of defining attributes and inscribed name. A satisfying interpretation of the more specific meaning of the scene represented, however, has so far not been presented. In ancient mythology, sailing on rafts is traditionally associated with Odysseus *viz.* the tale of how he constructed a seaworthy raft in order to leave Calypso's island (*Od.* 5.244-57)¹⁴. There is no mentioning of amphorae as floating aids in the Homeric verse. Neither do any other ancient texts seem helpful in this respect. The pictorial motif of a male figure sailing on an amphora raft can in fact be traced as far back as to the Late Minoan period, when it was first carved on seal-stones¹⁵. The motif first appears in Etruscan art on engraved gems from the early fifth century BCE onwards. On mirrors, so far, it only appears on large mirrors with divisions of their discs in three friezes appearing around 300 BCE.

Information versus communication – some methodological considerations

In the absence of literature images constitute crucial instruments for tracing and trying to understand Etruscan mentality. Therefore it is desirable that their interpretation gets as near as possible to any original pictorial language and intensions. Many of the new archaeologists of the 19th-century made a merit of not making interpretations¹⁶. The scholar should report an autopsy, not speculate, on the monument in analysis. That was the time of large corpus projects and the German lead in philology and scholarship. Collecting and reporting was their mission. Their thinking has fostered many, especially Northern European, scholars with an instinctive dislike of any speculations. Some of the 20th-century scholars from English speaking countries have had a different agenda of dealing with immaterial remnants as well as more steadfast ones. Less biased towards the possibilities of scientific methods they eventually partook in developing techniques for the dating

¹⁴ DOUGHERTY 2001, pp. 32-7.

¹⁵ BASCH 1976, pp. 85-87.

¹⁶ WIKANDER – WIKANDER, 2003, p. 15.

of ancient matter as well as ventures to explore the ancient mind¹⁷. The study of images, iconography, has undergone similar journeys from describing, for instance, stylistic traits of various hands in vase painting¹⁸ to establishing hermeneutic explanations as to imagery as a whole, iconology¹⁹.

In our quest for trying to make an Etruscan motif “speak”, we are confronting various levels of codification. Concepts from information theory²⁰ have proven useful in determining highly diverse, as opposed to more standardised, simple motifs on e.g. engraved mirrors and gems²¹. Image compositions with a higher degree of pictorial diversity provide more information. One way to make an image more informative is to provide it with so-called “redundant” details, pictorial particulars inserted in order to reduce the amount of information loss in the transmission of an intended message from transmitter to receiver. In other words, extras are added to guarantee that the viewer gets the right message. From the last remark it can be deduced that information is connected with the sending, or artistic intention, of a message or a picture—the reception is quite a different matter. In the process of transmittance, something may or may not interfere with a signal, and the signal sent may then reach its destination (the beholder) either disrupted or unchanged in relation to the original intent. Something critical happens to the signal the instant it is perceived by another human mind. Many attempts have been made at clarifying and evaluating this communication process and the various stages or meshes of the “art nexus”²². Basically, information and communication are interlocked but never soullessly copied from one mind to another”. It is possibly more fruitful to try and find the intention behind an ancient work of art than to estimate its content in the eye of the individual

¹⁷ To give an example of a scholar embodying these strivings, RENFREW 1974, 1994 and 2001.

¹⁸ BEAZLEY 1963.

¹⁹ MORGAN 1983.

²⁰ SHANNON – WEAVER 1949.

²¹ WIMAN 1990, p. 99: “...the higher the number of units, ‘species’, in an image or message, and the more equal the distribution of the members, ‘individuals’, belonging to the respective units, the higher the diversity i.e., information entropy of the image...”.

²² GELL 1998, and discussion thereof in DAVIS – TANNER – OSBORN 2007.

beholder, whether ancient or modern. This is controversial since, in the end, what really matters to us is trying to identify and understand cultural phenomena, and such phenomena of course depend as much on receivers as they do on givers. Tracing this latter communication process may, perhaps, appear trickier for a modern mind exposed to images than for an ancient Athenian or Etruscan one, since the modern mind is better trained and has more interpretive options. Modern media of all kinds are more diversified and operate on many different levels. So, for instance, information intended for one generation can be totally concealed to other age groups, etc. At least in our imagination, ancient societies were more conformed. Contacts with the outer world were limited to commerce, war or sporting games (and sometimes exploration expeditions). Resultant innovations of various kinds were further silted, since new thoughts normally diffuse through a population along the lines of social influence²³. In order to be effective, messages had to be economical and comprehensible to most beholders. Ancient images seldom billowed²⁴. Ambiguity could be strived for in a general sense, making an icon more useful for various contexts, as for instance “man on raft”²⁵. “*Hercle on an Amphora Raft*”, on the other hand, is an image of a specific mythological being, furnished with detailed iconographical particulars, performing the specified act of sailing on an amphora raft with his lion’s skin set as a sail. This pictorial motif is not ambiguous or hazardous in any way, and, since it made its appearance many times in at least two media (either undisrupted or fragmented), it must have had some specific meaning intelligible for the contemporary Etruscan audience. This meaning might therefore be possible for a modern scholar to decode.

²³ GARDNER – STERN 2002, p. 91.

²⁴ A motif can be virtually unchanged throughout Antiquity, that is if the narrative behind it was still comprehended. Illustrations of myths show slight variations and it can therefore be deduced that they were made as truthfully as possible to an ancient perception of a visual idea that had penetrated the society in question for generations.

²⁵ Certainly, ambiguity was consciously strived for in many pieces of ancient art. Especially during the Hellenistic period and in Roman Imperial art. Cfr. the discussions by J. Hughes (HUGUES 2009) on the Hadrianeum Nations or by POLLITT 1997 when discussing the scholarly, sophisticated nature of Hellenistic, Greek art. Etruscan earlier art, however, often follow the Greek codes more truthfully than in art from the periods here discussed.

Etruscan art is both narrative and emblematic, and the types of art forms discussed here are illustrative in this respect. Mirrors often display sophisticated and elaborated stories of traditional motifs, such as *the Judgment of Paris/Alcsentre* or *the Birth of Athena/Menrfa*, while carved gem devices show a very simplified or condensed part of a story or a “sign/index”. Therefore, it is very interesting to study a pictorial motif that appears in both these media. If we for a moment reconsider pictorial redundancy as a tool for tracing how successive copying or simplification or other effects affect a motif over time, and if we could critically assess these changes step by step, would it be possible to identify such a process of simplification or elaboration of a motif²⁶ like, for example, *Heracle on an Amphora Rafi*? Can deviations or additions (= redundancy) to a hypothetical image-prototype provide a key to the intended meaning? To what extent would details from a more diverse image diverge from those found in a simpler one²⁷? Another interesting question is how various parts of an image correlate to each other. Take, for instance, an Etruscan Archaic mirror from the British Museum²⁸, showing a large-footed female figure, elegantly dressed (Fig. 2). The woman approaches a young boy standing in front of her, presenting him with a flower and bud. In return, the youth offers her a mirror and a pomegranate. A dog is depicted leaping towards the boy, an attribute signifying aristocracy. The mirror the boy offers the woman can be seen as a token of love and a compliment to her beauty. Her greater size may indicate a hierarchical perspective, her being his senior both in age and rank. Because of both figures’ attributes associated with courting, and the woman’s seniority in regard to the boy, the scene has been interpreted as depicting *Turan* and *Atunis* based on the Greek/Oriental myth of the love between Adonis and Aphrodite. This interpretation appears to be well founded in relation to the exergue decoration showing a hen pursuing a fox cub²⁹, a humorous role-of-reversal reference to the motif in the upper, middle frieze. In this case, the scene decorating the exergue (lower part of the mirror disc) – however redundant – strengthens the credibility/plausi-

²⁶ WIMAN 1990, pp. 156-204.

²⁷ A thorough discussion of these issues is found in WIMAN 1990, pp. 94-103.

²⁸ CSE, Great Britain 1, cat. n. 18.

²⁹ The little animal exhibits a collar, like foxes have, upraised ears, and full fur but lacks the white tip of a grown animal, hence the interpretation.

bility of the interpretation of the main scene. Exergue decoration that is not directly connected to the main scene, separated by a baseline or some other device, is a rather uncommon feature. This compositional feature appears more frequently on later mirrors as, for instance, on the famous mirror displaying the motif *Dressing of Malavisch* (Fig. 3)³⁰, dated “around 300 BC”. Here, a female figure, probably a divine character,³¹ is depicted seated on a hassock with her feet on a footstool. She is being combed and perfumed by two attendants, supervised by the goddess of love. A rectangular label with the text *malavisch* is engraved above the crown of the woman’s hair. The character standing in front of her holding a mirror is seemingly also wearing pointed boots and should thus be divine. The label above this latter woman’s head, reading *hinthial*, is most interesting. In this context it seems to correspond to a meaning of “mirror-image” and in other cases it indicates a ghost or spirit, for example the ghost of Teiresias, *hinthial Terasias*’ invoked by Odysseus with the aid of blood from a ram depicted on a well-known mirror, now in the Vatican Museums, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco³², or as the ghost of *Patruclus* standing behind *Vanth* in the famous painting from the François tomb in Vulci³³. The exergue decoration in this case strengthens the coding of the scene as a generic “dressing of the bride” motif, since it depicts a hen and a rooster courting³⁴. It would not be too far-fetched to see this as a reference to the event of consummation awaiting the bride after the wedding. The little freeborn boy child adorning the extension represents the ultimate, wished-for, outcome of any marriage, which motivates his presence here. The scene may be interpreted as showing a perpetuated present state, an indicative mood of a bride being dressed. At the same time it shows the future in a metonymic sign of courtship and symbol for the consummation of the wedding. The extension changes mood to optative, the expected outcome of a marriage providing a male heir to

³⁰ ES 213, British Museum, London.

³¹ BONFANTE 1975, has demonstrated that pointed shoes were only worn by goddesses after 500 BC.

³² ES 2, 240.

³³ MORETTI SGUBINI 2004.

³⁴ The left-hand fowl does not have any crest. I (IW) have examined the mirror and it differs from the usual motif of cocks fighting and seemingly shows a hen instead of one fighter.

the gens.

Whether *Malavisch* is a divinized personification of a bride or an actual goddess remains unclear, but her name may opt for the first explanation since the word seems related to other words connected to female toilets, *Mal-stria*, *Mal-ena*, the two supposed terms assumed to signify “mirror”³⁵. The presence of the personified *hinthial* in this scene also points in that direction. In both these cases, the exergue decoration has a meaning connected to the main motif and, moreover, it offers a specific, humorous wink to the spectator. These exergue decorations are images that deviate from Greek norms and serve as “comments” to the scene. These comments should be most useful to the modern scholar when speculating on an Etruscan “spirit” and understanding certain scenes, whether seemingly conforming to a Greek norm or indigenous in character.

Mirrors with the *Heracle* on an Amphora Raft motif as exergue decoration

The motif appears engraved in the exergue-field of three mirrors. All three of these mirrors belong to a group of elaborately engraved discs divided into three picture fields (hereafter cited as *TPD*)³⁶. All the three parts of the mirrors are decorated and, generally, the decoration of the tympanum field is repetitive, showing either a winged female in a quadriga (*Thesan*)³⁷, one or two reclining figures, a single head, or just a geometric decoration, among the most usual ones. These upper friezes provide the basis for a more detailed taxonomy of the group. Two of the mirrors examined below belong to the *Thesan* tympanum type, and one to the type with a reclining figure in the tympanum. A fourth mirror exhibits some deviations from the standard formula, but is nevertheless judged to belong to the group discussed here. It is of the *Thesan* tympanum type. The first mirror

³⁵ BONFANTE 1977, pp. 149-168.

³⁶ WIMAN 1990, pp. 117-119. A most interesting new article treats a group of these mirrors, BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009, pp. 82-90.

³⁷ The female behind the horses is never named even if the other characters in the picture fields have inscriptions stating their names. De Puma, among others, identifies her with Eos/Aurora riding in her quadriga, *CSE USA* 1, 1987, cat. n. 4, 19; see also DE GRUMMOND 2006, pp. 106-112.

is one from Cerveteri now in the British Museum, Walters catalogue n. 627 (Fig. 1), displaying the goddess with quadriga in the tympanum field, Helen gripping the Palladion in the middle frieze, and in the exergue field a bearded and naked *Hercle* with upraised arms, a club above his head held in his right hand and the left holding a bow. He is depicted seated in three-quarter profile on an amphora raft. His left leg is bent and shown to calf height above the raft. Of the right leg only the thigh is visible. Behind him, the lion skin is set as a sail, tied to two pegs. Below the platform three pairs of amphorae are tied to the raft by the handles.

The second item is a mirror from Bolsena now in the British Museum inv. no 318³⁸ (Fig. 4). The head of *Thesan* between two pairs of horses' heads decorate the tympanum field, the middle frieze shows an intriguing and much discussed scene mixing Etruscan and Greek mythical figures. The scene has recently been interpreted as newborn spirits presented to *Menrfa* in exchange for her protection³⁹. The exergue shows *Hercle* kneeling or standing on an amphora raft. He holds his club in his right hand in front of his shoulder. He grips the lion skin sail with his left hand as if gaining support in the act of leaving the raft. Curiously enough, he has a second lion skin tied around his neck. The raft is supported by five amphorae drawn in a kind of perspective, three in a front line, and two behind.

The third mirror comes from the Chiusi territory and is now in Palermo Museo Archeologico Regionale inv. n. 5640 *ES* 149⁴⁰, (Fig. 5). The mirror belongs to "the reclining figure tympanum type"⁴¹ and shows a reclining nude female with head to the left of the mirror disc reclining on a band with an unfilled meander pattern. Her right arm rests against the border and what seems to be an up-side-down drinking cup to the left. The middle frieze depicts a drunken *Hercle*, centrally placed on the disc, supported by flanking pairs belonging to his thiasos. *Hercle* is rising from the amphora raft in the scene on the exergue. His left leg is slightly bent, his left hand gripping the bow. He wears his lion skin tied to the neck, has a cloth tied around his hips and holds his club in front of his right shoulder. He seems in position in the act of leaving the raft, of which only the

³⁸ WALTERS 1899, n. 618, 92; *ES* III, n. 257b.

³⁹ DE GRUMMOND 2006, p. 75. Compare the scene on a related mirror from Chiusi, *CSE*, Deutschland 4, 28a.

⁴⁰ *ES*, CXLIX; *ES* 149.

⁴¹ WIMAN 1990, p. 118.

platform is visible. He is bearded and appears somewhat older than in the first mirror of the series.

A final mirror displays a similar, albeit not quite identical, image of a youthful *Heracle*, a mirror from Todi (Fig. 6) now in the Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia inv. n. 2745, Rome⁴². Thesauri with four horses decorate the tympanum frieze, the Morning Star is engraved above her head and a large male head with a raised hand is placed to the left of her. A *Judgment of Paris* motif is detectable in the main field, the protagonists flanked by *tehrs* to the right and a female fan-holder, *snenathturns*, to the left. A youthful *Heracle* is shown in the exergue, sitting with his head resting in his right palm and his left hand on his bent left leg. The club is drawn as if floating in the air with a quiver above it, placed in the area to *Heracle's* right. He wears his lion skin tied to his neck; another skin with a paw and a lion's head is visible to the left of him. It is placed in the same position as the lion skin sail in the three examples above, but the skin is here unilateral. He sits on what seems to be flames of fire. There is a horizontal tiny line beside his left buttock, another at the side of his feet and a curved line below the latter one, representing what could be interpreted as lines of a large *depas*⁴³ surrounded by flames. The engravings are very worn in this area and it is difficult to determine what we actually see here.

The Amphora Raft and related imagery on engraved gems

The art of engraving hard, semi-precious stones was introduced in Etruria sometime in the third quarter of the sixth century BCE, and only a generation later, Etruscan craftsmen had become highly skilled in the new craft and were, producing works of exceptional technical quality⁴⁴. The motif with the earliest preserved representation of *Heracle sailing on an Amphora Raft* in Etruscan art first appears in the Early Classical period, more precisely on a scarab gem (Fig. 7) device found at Corchiano and dated on stylistic grounds to c. 475/450 BCE., This is also the first time that the motif appears in Etruscan art, and it is thus more or less contemporary

⁴² BENDINELLI 1914, pp. 622-25, tav. III.

⁴³ See below, footnote 70.

⁴⁴ For an overview of the production of engraved gems in pre-Roman Italy, see ZAZOFF 1968 and more recently HANSSON 2013.

with the first written evidence in Etruria for the name *Heracle*⁴⁵. Three additional representations survive from the late 5th and 4th centuries and close to 40 in the so-called *a globolo* technique, which had a peak in production c. 325-275 BCE⁴⁶. All of these examples are from scarab gems, there are no known flat or convex ring-stones carrying this specific subject-matter. The ratio between the number of early and late Amphora Raft representations within the glyptic material roughly corresponds to the actual number of preserved gems in the various scarab style and motif groups. It may therefore not reflect the general popularity of the myth or narrative associated with this specific motif, since the preserved gems from the early period are very few in number and the evidence therefore inconclusive in that respect. Like Herakles, *Heracle* is often associated with running water and amphorae in Etruria as well as elsewhere in pre-Roman Italy, where he was seen as a water-bringer and the founder of sacred springs⁴⁷. The numerous depictions on gems and on some mirrors of this hero-god filling an amphora with water running from a fountain or spring, attest to the considerable popularity of the hero-god in this capacity in the Etrusco-Italic cultural spheres⁴⁸. As in the case of the *Amphora Raft* motif, the figure of *Heracle by the Spring* is often substituted with a satyr or a generic youth. It has been suggested that these two motifs, the Amphora Raft and the Fountain, actually belong to one and the same theme of transition, and that they should therefore be studied together⁴⁹.

On gems, the identification of the figure sailing on the raft with the hero-god *Heracle* can often be plausibly established through added visual attributes, notably a club or a lion skin. Often, however, the depicted figure, invariably male, remains unnamed and without any defining attributes, and there are no inscriptions on gem devices depicting the Amphora Raft

⁴⁵ The earliest attested inscription is on an unpublished Attic *kylix* dated ca 480 BC. SCHWARZ 1990.

⁴⁶ For a complete list, see HANSSON 2005, p. 111 s. and indices s.v. Herakles, Satyr and Turtle. Cfr. also STIGLITZ 1959; HANSSON 2002.

⁴⁷ E.g. Roscher 1:2, col 2237, s.v. *Heracles* (A. FURTWÄNGLER); PRAYON 1988; GILOTTA 2003.

⁴⁸ E.g. MANSUELLI 1941; see for instance the mirror *CSE*, Italia 1. I. 39 where *Heracle* is seen filling an amphora under the aegis of Menrfa or *CSE* Italia 1. I. 12 showing *Heracle* with a foot on an amphora from which water flows out.

⁴⁹ TORELLI 2002, p. 128 f.

actually naming *Hercle*. Sometimes, satyr replaces the usual male figure⁵⁰, and in one exceptional gem composition *Hercle* and a satyr have been depicted together on the raft⁵¹. Related imagery include a turtle sailing alone on the a raft, a raft structure without an figures and four loosely tied amphorae surrounded by dolphins⁵². On the earliest known example, now in Copenhagen, *Hercle* is depicted reclining, sailing the raft using his club as rudder and his lion skin as sail (Fig. 7). In the sky above him can be seen the sun, the moon, and a single star. Behind him of the raft is his bow. On either side of the row of amphorae that supports the raft has been added two star-like objects in the form of round blobs with four spikes. On later specimens, a satyr holding either a thyrsus or a dolphin in his hand replaces *Hercle*⁵³. One gem device shows a standing male figure with a sword or knife bending over a long-necked water bird, as if performing a sacrificial act⁵⁴. The whole motif group was discussed in some detail by A. Stiglitz in the late 1950s and later also by e.g. Pfiffig and Torelli, but with various suggestions as to possible meaning⁵⁵.

The relative absence of narrative elements and, in some cases, even of defining details makes any clearcut interpretation of the scene difficult. The compositional components that may contribute to the reading of the image scenes represented and their possible message(s) are the following: male figure, *Hercle*, satyr, turtle, raft, amphora, sail, club, lion skin, bow, sword/knife, water bird, water/waves, thyrsus, dolphin, sun, moon, star. Quivers, bows and arrows are curiously absent from the representations on gems.

The motif of *Hercle* on an amphora raft

What does this intriguing and elusive pictorial element really mean in the contexts where it is used on Etruscan mirrors? Is it part of an

⁵⁰ Göttingen, Arch. Inst. G 20 (*AGD* III, pl. 28:6; HANSSON 2005, pl. 1:2); Göteborg, City Museum GAM 21934-6 (HANSSON 2005, pl. 1:6); Vienna, Kunsthist. Mus. IX B 203 (ZWIERLEIN-DIEHL 1973, pl. 12:55; HANSSON 2005, pl. 1:12).

⁵¹ Rome, Villa Giulia, no inv. ZAZOFF 1968, pl. 45: 234; HANSSON 2005, pl. 1:11.

⁵² Vienna, Kunsthist. Mus., IX B 208. ZWIERLEIN-DIEHL 1973, pl. 16:90; HANSSON 2005, pl. 1:10. Rome, Mus. Naz. Rom. 107962. HANSSON 2005, pl. 1:26.

⁵³ Vienna, Kunsthist. Mus. IX B 203. ZWIERLEIN-DIEHL 1973, pl. 12:55; HANSSON 2005, pl. 1:12.

⁵⁴ Rome, Villa Giulia, no inv. ZAZOFF 1968, pl. 44:233; HANSSON 2005, pl. 1:3.

⁵⁵ STIGLITZ 1959. Cfr. also HANSSON 2005, p. 211 and *passim*; 2002; TORELLI 2002.

Etruscan narration or just a symbol and, if so, what does it stand for? What is its specific relation to the other pictorial fields of the mirrors discussed? How is the more emblematic scene on intaglios related to the more detailed scenes on the mirror exergues? Beginning with the most detailed motif, the mirror (Fig. 1) described above, in line with the idea of the most elaborate drawing being the most informative, a raft is clearly seen and *Heracle* seated on it. He is represented prepared with bow and club in a threatening pose that seems to anticipate struggle. In the next image (Fig. 4), *Heracle* is shown standing on the raft. He has his club in his right hand as if ready eventually to use it and possibly also to leave the raft. In the third example (Fig. 5), *Heracle* is more obviously represented on the point of leaving the raft, with his bow and club in a ready-to-battle position. The fourth and last mirror in the group shows a more youthful *Heracle*, here a mere boy, more passive as if troubled or tired. The only element in common with the other obvious raft scenes is one lion's paw in the same position. This kind of triangular arrangements of the exergue field is not uncommon. Many mirrors of the *TPD* group show out-stretched wings⁵⁶, snakes in out-stretched hands⁵⁷, large flowers⁵⁸, or other elements fitted to the triangular space. Of the tympanon motifs Thesan with the quadriga is by far the most common. One curious exception is a mirror from Perugia where *Thesan* is replaced by a youth *Auri* with two horses. A hitherto unknown character supposed by de Grummond to symbolize the moon sinking below the horizon⁵⁹. Eight of these *TPD* mirrors have recently been collected together by Bagnasco Gianni, due to the subject on their discs, which depict Etruscan oracular practices⁶⁰. In five, maybe six, of them a

⁵⁶ *CSE*, Belgique, 1, cat. n. 25, Bundesrepublik Deutschland II, cat. n. 18, Netherlands, cat. n. 01.

⁵⁷ *CSE* U.S.A. I, cat. n. 04.

⁵⁸ Cfr. a group collected by NAGY 1996, pp. 54-55.

⁵⁹ DE GRUMMOND 2006, p. 192.

⁶⁰ See for instance a mirror in the British Museum *CSE* GB I, cat. n. 28 where a *lasa* stands with a book roll with the inscribed names of three doomed warriors, and a tomb painting in Tomba Golini I, Orvieto where she stands with the roll recording the fate of the deceased. Due to her likeness with the inscribed mirror *lasa* and the Golini image of her we suggest that here we see the *lasa* in her prophesying role. Cfr. PFIFFIG 1975 on the cognomen *Vecu* as *Vegoia*, pp. 132-3.

prophesying head is singing oracles to a recording scribe. Four of these are linked together by an exergue decoration of winged naked females. This is possibly *Lasa* in her presaging role. Typically, the mirrors with this kind of collaboration between disc motif and exergue subject are the most informative ones, abundant with redundant details. Interestingly, this *Lasa* is also known from 4th- to 2nd-cent. ring-stones⁶¹. From the same tomb as the Todi mirror was found a ringstone depicting two nude women, one gazing in a mirror held high above her head. By her side runs a vertical inscription reading *lasavecuvia*⁶². Again, we find parallels of choices of motifs on engraved glyptic art and mirrors from the period. Mirrors belonging to the *TPD-group* all have large discs allowing the display of elaborate and intriguing motifs. They differ considerably from other, earlier mirrors, or contemporary handle mirrors, even if some handle mirrors with a smaller diameter belong with the group⁶³. The *TPD* type mirrors discussed above, displaying oracular practices connected to a severed head which sings oracles written down by a mantic on these mirrors. Bagnasco Gianni has thus also made the observation that the exergue field, or extension, on these mirrors carries scenes connected to the main motif⁶⁴. Four of them show a naked, winged female, most probably a *lasa* as referred to above. In an earlier work, Bagnasco Gianni argues that the common motif on later handle mirrors depicting *lasa* with an alabastron in her left and a stick in her right hand highlight two of her aspects, beautification and divination. The stick in her left hand is interpreted not as a perfume rod but a *stylos*⁶⁵. The *stylos* here symbolizes the mantic functions of the *lasa*, documented in mirrors and tombs. She suggests that these mirrors are connected to the practice of catoptromancy, divination by

⁶¹ MARTINI 1971, nn. 8, 35, 37, 49, 50, 65, 111, 133, 137, 192, 208.

⁶² BIANCHI-BANDINELLI 1914, p. 618.

⁶³ WIMAN 1990, p. 119.

⁶⁴ BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009, figg. 1-4, 36.

⁶⁵ BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009.

means of mirrors⁶⁶. If so, this group shows a performance, in this case a possible reference to a real use of them in divinatory actions.

Media interaction, text to image, image to image

A Greek narrative is most interesting in connection with the *Heracle on an amphora raft* representations. The narrative in question is attested as early as Hesiod and relates the story about Geryon, the roarer, who had three heads and lived on Erytheia, the sunset-colored island in the far West⁶⁷. Geryon owned marvelous purple cattle, which, on Eurystheus command, Herakles brought to Argolis after having killed Geryon. A fragment from Stesichorus (Page *LGS* 185)⁶⁸ talks about the means of transport which Herakles uses in order to sail to the extreme West, a *depas*⁶⁹. Herakles forces or tricks Helios into lending him the

⁶⁶ “...But the mirror, that most strange thing that allows not only reflection but self-reflection, has always been special. As a result there are many superstitions about mirrors — such that they must be covered or removed after a death to prevent the soul of the dead person from being stolen. In part it also explains why it is considered bad luck to break one (until modern times, they were also rare, so breaking one really was bad luck). There are records from many ancient civilisations of mirrors being used for magic, and some not so ancient: John Dee, the sixteenth-century English magician of the royal court, had a mirror made of a highly polished piece of coal. Fortune-tellers and magicians would use such stones, or perhaps polished metal mirrors or reflections in bowls of water to answer questions or predict the future. The word comes from the Greek word *katoptron* for a mirror, plus *manteia*, divination. The same root appears in *catoptrics*, the part of optics that deals with reflection.” Internet source: <http://www.worldwidewords.org> © Michael Quinion, 1996–2009.

⁶⁷ E.g. D’AGOSTINO – CERCHIAI 1999, pp. 151–162; BURKERT 1973; 1979; ROBERTSON 1969; BRIZE 1980.

⁶⁸ PAGE 1968, pp. 263–689.

⁶⁹ A name that Stesichorus uses and is also used in Homer to describe the cup of Nestor. Prof. John Bennet kindly informed us that *depas* may appear in the Linear-B tablets in the form *di-pa* and is used for a larger bowl with none, three or more handles on the rim. According to Bennet, Nestor’s cup was a large bowl and hence it signifies strength and good drinking abilities, a kind of joke on Homer’s behalf. The bowl painted on the Attic vases in question could reflect the large *depas* mentioned in the Stesichorus fragment. An interesting analogy to this image in Etruscan art is the images of Eurystheus hiding in a cauldron, cfr. KRAUSKOPF 1974, pl. 6:4.

golden bowl which Helios uses to sail from West to East during the night. According to Burkert, this tale was especially important in Italy and Sicily, and Burkert emphasises the astonishingly many local traditions to which this tale has been applied. It is invariably this cattle, getting lost or stolen, that gives rise to new labours for Herakles⁷⁰. As Burkert notes, this narration is not frequent in Attic vase-paintings, but some depictions of it exists. *LIMC* lists eight examples, all from the period between c. 510-450 BCE⁷¹. Five of these depict Herakles' encounter with Helios, either threatening him on the shore of Oceanus or safe on the shore of Erytheia (2545-49). A lecythus, for instance, now in Athens National Museum inv. n. 513⁷² shows Herakles lurking on the beach with his bow in hand, seemingly sweet-talking Helios to abandon the *depas* to him. Even more interesting are the three vases actually depicting Herakles sitting on the rim of or inside a bowl (*dinos* or *lebes*) faring through Oceanus (Fig. 8)⁷³. Interesting in this connection is that several late Etruscan gems made in the *a globolo* technique depict a one- to three-headed monster, which is probably to be identified with Geryon⁷⁴. No inscription on mirrors, however, names this monster on their discs but allude more subtly to this tale by showing *Heracle* as the hero who had Geryon slain as will be discussed later. Tomba dell'Orco II depicts Geryon/*Cerun* facing with all three heads the divine rulers of the Underworld.

Herakles/*Heracle* in Etruria

From very early on, Herakles was established as a figure of central importance in all of Italy – a name Varro states actually meaning “land of cattle” (*Rust.* II, V.3.). In the Etrusco-Italic cultural sphere, the figure seems to have enjoyed a special status, more elevated than the one he had in Greece, a hero-god approaching divine status. The Etruscan *Heracle* thus seems to have differed in significant respects from the Greek Herakles. He appears as one of few recognisable divinities on

⁷⁰ BURKERT 1979, pp. 83-84.

⁷¹ *Herakles*, p. 84.

⁷² *Herakles*, n. 2545.

⁷³ *Herakles*, nn. 2550, 2551 and 2552.

⁷⁴ HANSSON 2005, catalogue.

6th-century terracotta slabs from central Etruscan settlements, as mastering the bull or the lion⁷⁵, and also together with Geryon on the earlier so-called Gobbi crater from Cerveteri, dated to c. 590/580 BCE (or 560, according to others)⁷⁶. Italy was by old a land of pastoralists and Herakles was the master of animals, the protector of flocks and herds, of shepherds and herdsmen⁷⁷. He was worshiped in shrines along the various *callis* leading from valleys and up into the mountains of the peninsula, some nodes eventually growing to large commercial centra (for instance Hercules Victor at Tivoli)⁷⁸.

In addition to his *athla*, when persecuted by Hera, Herakles, is also seen as the defender of the goddess against creatures such as satyrs and giants⁷⁹. Herakles and *Heracle*, as discussed above, became associated with water, especially running water⁸⁰. A symbol of running water in Graeco-Roman iconography was often an amphora held either to a spout of a nymphaeum or simply depicted reclining on the ground with the mouth facing the onlooker. The motif *Heracle on an Amphora Raft* thus seems to combine elements from the journey to the extreme west in Erytheia, including the coming fight with Geryon and the procuring of his purple cattle, and from the water-bringer theme (the amphora). Aside mentioned capacities, *Heracle* was furthermore the one who could enter the Underworld and return, and he is thus also a symbol of a possible return from the Underworld. A famous mirror in Florence shows *Heracle suckling Uni*⁸¹. This mirror belongs to the three-parted disc group with a satyr, who is depicted reclining and drinking from a *phiale*, in the tympanum. The extension shows a naked winged boy holding an egg in each hand. The egg is a common symbol of rebirth, and here it serves as a redundant comment to the

⁷⁵ Acquarossa, Velletri, Tuscania among others, see STRANDBERG OLOFSSON 1984, cap. 3.

⁷⁶ Rome, Villa Giulia. BRIZE 1988, p. 188, n. 19.

⁷⁷ BURKERT 1979, pp. 78-98; BRADLEY 2005.

⁷⁸ BJUR – SANTILLO FRIZELL 2009. (Interestingly and as a parenthesis, Bagnasco Gianni proposes a reading of the name *Umaele*, a character present in the mirrors discussed above, as equivalent to Eumalus, a member of the Bacchiads from Corinth. His name means “rich in herds”, BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009).

⁷⁹ E.g. VALENZA MELE 1984.

⁸⁰ *Roscher* 1:2, c. 2237, s.v. *Heracles* (A. FURTWÄGLER).

⁸¹ Florence, Mus. Arch. *ES* 5, pl. 60.

middle frieze. Thus, the mirror deals with the aspect of *Hercle* as a hero-god becoming immortal by his deeds. It has been suggested that he has something to do with protection of newborn spirits based on a motif where he appears together with Athena/*Menrfa* and small *Maris* babies with various names (cfr. Fig. 4)⁸². Another aspect of Herakles is his travel from East to West highlighted in the motif here discussed. Herakles is the intrepid one, journeying to the extreme West and dutifully shouldering a great mission. Seafaring was and is always an enterprising task, and a safe return is in no way guaranteed. It involves questions of identity and alterity in an almost metaphysical sense. A trip to an unknown “behind” has been a reality for those who explore or colonize new territory with no intent of a return⁸³. Thus, any narration of a journey may be taken as a metaphor for the unknown, and a powerful one. By alluding to this journey with the aid of a motif like *Hercle on an Amphora Raft* on gemstones, aristocratic families could commemorate stories and beliefs in a descent from the East, most probably Hellas or Troy, and allude to seafaring and adventuresome journeys from East to West as heroically as the one *Hercle* himself undertook. The journey to a remote and unknown shore, and the safe return from it, could indicate a “safe journey” in general – a fitting emblem to a sea-faring merchant belonging to the Etruscan élite. The extreme West also functions as a metaphor for evening, dusk and death. *Hercle* sails towards the West uncertain of the outcome of such an expedition. Furthermore he is quite alone, his accustomed helper, Athena, seems not to have travelled with him to the red island of the setting sun. The amphora raft motif can also be seen as a powerful symbol not only of a travel from East to West, but of the journey towards the end of day in analogy with the dawning and dying/setting sun. We propose that, seen in context with *Thesan* in the tympanum field, the motif is to be conceived of as a metonym for “dusk” and might possibly have served as such even when occurring in other contexts.

If we are right in our interpretation of the motif of *Hercle on an Amphora Raft* a final, and most intriguing, question arises: what relations can be established within the various parts of the mirror – what is presented between dawn and dusk? Is the setting here a reference to Attic theatre, starting at sunrise and ending at sunset? *Thesan* announces the

⁸² DE GRUMMOND 2006, pp. 72-78.

⁸³ D’AGOSTINO – CERCHIAI 1999, pp. 73-80, 81-88 on the earlier period.

start of the performances at dawn and *Heracle* signifies their ending at the end of the day, as was customary in Athens at the great Dionysia. This means that the motif in-between could allude to an actual dramatic performance, or an analogy of it. The scenes in our mirrors all have strong connections to drama or performances of various kinds. Number one shows a theatrical scene with Helen desperately gripping the Palladion and Menaclus prepared to kill her, a dramatic cliffhanger, a boiled down concentrate of the whole story of the Trojan War. Number two seems to be associated with another type of presentation: three small toddlers, *maris* with various second names are carried or touched by divinities. They all wear the freeborn child's bulla, a token of their gentility. Two of these surnames appear in another mirror with the same theme⁸⁴. The third motif shows a drunken *Heracle* supported by a satyr and a maenad. The mirror is worn and parts of it are obscured. A female to the left is, seemingly, an on-looking bystander (another maenad?), a small boy is seated on what could be interpreted as a lion skin and a male figure with a thyrsus in his left hand appears to be wearing a lion-skin, draped as the one *Heracle* himself usually wears. The tympanum field shows a naked reclining female, also obscured by corrosion. The exergue *Heracle* appears in much the same position as on the previous mirror. The fourth mirror here collected, shows one of the most favoured motifs in Etruscan mirrors, *The judgment of Paris*, in an elaborate version. *Menrfa* wrinkles her forehead as if angered and looks directly at *Alcsantre*, and *Uni* is seemingly pointing at *Turan* who is standing half-naked in front of the comfortably seated Trojan. It is a dramatically drawn scene showing unusual pathos. The position of *Menrfa's* head is echoed in the head of the youthful *Heracle* on the exergue. He looks pensive, troubled or tired, less active than he is shown in the mirrors, where he emerges from the amphora raft. Also, the tympanum is more elaborate with an encircled star above the head of *Thesan* and a large head with an upraised arm emerging to her right. All mirrors collected here belong to the *TPD* mirrors, as discussed above.

Images of various types of performances thus seem to be a common feature of these *TPD* mirrors. In the case of the *Heracle* raft mirrors, this could allude to real, theatrical performances played in theatres in

⁸⁴ DE GRUMMOND 2006, pp. 72-78.

Etruria, as has been suggested by several scholars⁸⁵. This interpretation is consistent with their general setting between symbols of a rising and setting sun, which further strengthens the argument of the motif *Hercle on an amphora raft* as a symbol of dusk. Interestingly, monuments from around 300 BCE may reflect a shade of Etruscan literature, thus not completely lost. Inscriptions on mirrors name characters known from Roman writers in Augustan times. Examples are *Mezentie*, the cruel Mezentius by Vergil (*Aen.* 7-10)⁸⁶ or the Vibennae brothers with or without Servius Tullius (*Macstrna*) decorating sarcophagi, tombs and a mirror from the period⁸⁷. If comparing the background settings of the *TPD* mirrors, with information given by Vitruvius in connection with the construction of theatres, pertinent new views might be deduced. The Roman theatre has three types of stages, he declares. Columns and the like are used for palatial facades in dramatic performances, private houses for comedy, and, finally, satyr-plays are furnished with devices from the natural environment, trees, cliffs etc. (*De arch.* 5. 6. 9.). A mirror in the British Museum, cat. n. 633, shows the Vibennae brothers in such a setting of nature, rocks and trees complete with a satyr climbing up to inspect the scene, above the cliff to the left. Many mirrors of the period have backgrounds of columns and frontispieces compatible with Vitruvius' idea of a proper setting for dramas. It cannot be overlooked, however, that the "performance" shown in these mirrors is symbolic, a scholarly allusion to Greek theatre by erudite Etruscan aristocrats investing in a cultural capital in times of increased Roman aggression⁸⁸. Such motifs could also have served as an equivalent to a modern "memory-stick", commemorating stories and, in details like the raft motif, as deeds of imaginary or real ancestors. Perhaps the more "simple" motif on gemstones should all be seen in this connection, used as a symbol of distant journeys and used by élite Etruscan merchants sealing their goods by an emblem alluding to an ancestry in a distant past of immigrants or traders faring East to West.

⁸⁵ WIMAN 1990, pp. 201-3 with bibliography; for a discussion on illustrated drama, SMALL 2003, 37-78 with an extensive bibliography; CAMPOREALE 2012, pp. 155-164.

⁸⁶ DE GRUMMOND 2006, pp. 201-207.

⁸⁷ SMALL 1984 collects them all.

⁸⁸ ZANKER 1995; WIMAN – BACKE FORSBERG 2006-2007.

Concluding remarks

Details on the mirror discs, as discussed above, must be seen as an inseparable unity with all “friezes” or decorations on any specific mirror and can, furthermore, provide vital clues as to the decoding of an image and of Etruscan additions to or elaborations of an originally Greek narration, as in the example Herakles/*Heracle* visiting the extreme West. The Etruscan artists omitted the *depas* and placed *Heracle* on a raft with amphorae as floating aids perhaps in analogy with Odysseus’ journey from Calypso’s island. The example “man on raft” on gemstones, however, has a different “idiom” not supplied by the context. They exhibit a concentrate of a story, any story that is combining elements of *Heracle* with an amphorae raft. It is intentionally ambiguous in order to fulfill any expectation as to signs of meaning. The narrations on the mirrors are all younger and they may or may not be elaborations of the earlier gemstone images. The motif *Heracle on an Amphora Raft* just appears in *TPD* mirrors that have strong connotations of performances of various kinds. Whether these may consist of divinatory practices or are images from a real staging is of course not possible to state conclusively. The setting of the main scene, however, between *Thesan* raising in the East and *Heracle* sailing West with the setting sun in the evening at least could lead the mind in that direction.

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Fig. 1. A mirror from Cerveteri, now in the British Museum, W 627. Published by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 2. Etruscan Archaic mirror from British Museum, CSE, GB 1, cat. n. 18. Published by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



*Fig. 3. An Etruscan engraved mirror from British Museum.
After DE GRUMMOND 2006, fig. VII.15.*



*Fig. 4. A mirror from Bolsena, now in the British Museum.
After DE GRUMMOND 2006, fig. V.5.*



Fig. 5. A mirror from the Chiusi territory, now in Palermo Museo Archeologico Regionale inv. n. N.I. 5640. After ES, 149.



Fig. 6. A mirror from Todi now in Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, Rome. After DE GRUMMOND 2006, fig. V.22.



Fig. 7. A scarab gem from Corchiano, now in Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark, Collection of Near Eastern and Classical Antiquities, inv. 3711. Photo ©Ulf R. Hansson, courtesy of the National Museum of Denmark.



Fig. 8. Heracle in a depas from the tondo motif of a kylix, Rome, Musei Vaticani, inv. n. 16563. After Herakles, n. 2552.