Women in antiquity

Author(s) Budin, Stephanie Lynn; Turfa, Jean MacIntosh

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ETRUSCAN MARRIAGE

Gilda Bartoloni and Federica Pitzalis

Etruscan society, like many others both ancient and modern, based its stability on family ties and, from its earliest phases, attributed great importance to the marriage covenant.

Written sources

Any reflection on this topic, however, as on any other aspect of Etruscan culture, suffers severely from the lack of direct historical and literary sources which might have explained at least some of the more complex aspects of the subject (Bartoloni and Pitzalis 2011a). The epigraphic documents, however, offer some indications. Among the known words of the Etruscan language, an explicit reference to the marriage bond and to the role that spouses assume toward each other is recognized in the terms *puia* "*wife*," especially used in the gamonymic form (name states "the wife of X"), and in *tuśurthi, tuśurthii, tusurthir*, which probably designated "the spouses" (Heurgon 1963: 109; Benelli 2009: 316–317, 404).

The ancient historians, especially the Greeks, have fueled the misunderstanding of an unlikely Etruscan matriarchy, in which the woman would have power equal to or even greater than that of her husband (Aristotle, Fragment 566 Rose, *apud* Athenaeus 1.42.23d; Timaeus *apud* Athenaeus 4.38.153d and 12.14.517d; Theophrastus *apud* Athenaeus 12.14.517d-518; Alcaeus in Athenaeus 12. 14.518; Plautus *Cistellaria* 561–562; Horace *Ode* 3.10.11–12). The conduct of "Tyrrhenian" women, moreover, was tarnished by numerous prejudices, as appears evident in the story of Tarquin, humiliated by the comparison of the modesty of the Latin wives with the debauchery of his own wife (Livy 1.57ff.), or by that of the Chiusine Arruns who abandoned his own city because of the public infidelity of his wife, initially demanding compensation and only later devising his revenge (Livy 5.33; see also Sordi 1977). These tales are only disavowed by a few Latin authors such as Virgil (Virgil, *Georgics* 2.523ff.; *Aeneid* 12.270) and Musonius Rufus, admirers of the strength and humanity of the Etruscan family, within which all children were raised without distinction and which bestowed equal status on both sexes, "equally endowed with intelligence" (Musonius Fragment XV, Papyrus Harr.1).

The study of the prosopography of the Etruscan cities and of onomastic formulae, which provide for the general use of the *praenomen* and the diffusion of the matronymic (use of the mother's name), suggest, along with other indications linked to material culture, that,

compared to Greek or Roman women, Etruscan women exercised greater influence in society in general and in the processes of succession and inheritance. An Etruscan woman, in contrast to a Roman, possessed a legal autonomy that continued even after marriage (Sordi 1995), when her life does not appear to have been entirely circumscribed by the domestic sphere. Iconography offers, in fact, numerous examples of the presence of women in contexts of social interaction, often portraying such women in the act of participating in banquets (see Bartoloni and Pitzalis, Chapter 57, this volume).

Social mobility and bonds of alliance

In any case, it is in marriage that the woman fulfills her social destiny (Bartoloni and Pitzalis 2011b). In the earliest phases of Etruscan culture (ninth to seventh centuries BC), marriage with foreign women is documented, as is shown especially in the numerous ornaments of imported types found in their tombs. In some cases, instead, in the aristocratic groups, the woman's family would willingly accept a foreign husband rather than a local man of lower social order, as demonstrated in the story of Demaratus, who came from Corinth to Tarquinia, where he married a local woman, from whom would be born the future king of Rome, Tarquinius Priscus (Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *Antiquities*. 3.46ff.; Strabo 5.2.2; 8.6.20; Pliny, *Natural History* 35.16; Livy 1.34). A union between an aristocratic Etruscan woman and a Picene man also seems to be documented at Verucchio (near Rimini), in the tomb of a man, tomb 89 in the Lippi necropolis, where the deceased seems to have inherited a throne from his mother and an Umbrian-Picene helmet from his father (Torelli 1997: 73–81).

This openness toward foreign communities is reflected as well in the oldest tradition of *conubium*, later reworked by Roman law into its better known legal form, intended as the *access to an exchange of marriage partners between neighboring populations of the area of Etruria and Latium* (Livy 1.9.2). The marriage bond, in fact, constituted a prime means to establish and consolidate alliances in the short and long range, and was fully part of the broader mechanism of aristocratic gift-exchange: in this case it is the woman who is considered to be a valuable asset (Finley 1955; Bartoloni and Pitzalis 2011b: 138 with bibliography).

With the consolidation of the urban plan, however, marriage practices must have suffered a stiffening, veering toward an endogamous system (marriage bonds between members of the same community), as evidenced by the later epigraphic documentation. From the second century on, in northern Etruria, the sepulchral inscriptions have restored for us the reality of married women, who return from gravitating in the orbit of the husband's family and are buried in the tomb of their natal family. A limited case is represented in the Tomba delle Madri e delle Figlie ("Tomb of the Mothers and Daughters") of the Santa Lucia necropolis at Perugia containing four or five generations of exclusively female burials (Nielsen 1989: 143).

Until at least the seventh century BC, the marriage covenant probably required, according to the Homeric model, the payment by the groom of gifts (*hedna*) to the family of the bride; this compensated not so much for the loss of the woman, as for her "generative potential." With the phase of urbanization, instead, customs must have undergone an evolution parallel to that of the Greek world, replacing the *hedna* with the *pròix*, the dowry that the *nupta* brought with her into her new *oikos* (household) (Leduc 2003; cf. also Scheid Tissinier 1999). Social mobility in the earlier phases must be understood as operating horizontally, allowed only between members of the same social class, although of different communities; it achieved a greater dynamism in a later period, contemplating the possibility of unions even between individuals of different social classes, as is shown by a Chiusine urn on which is celebrated the lawful union of an aristocratic Etruscan woman with her freedman of Syrian origin (Sordi 1995: 168).

Marriage as a rite of passage

Marriage as a fundamental stage of life, especially in the lives of women, should be understood as a regular rite of passage, preceded and accompanied by a series of codified acts, which confirm the break with the past life as a girl and the acquisition of a new status. In the iconographic repertoire, scenes of abduction have been considered as a kind of violent "mythological paradigm of marriage" (Webster 1972; Napolitano 1992). The theme is widespread in the Etruscan-Italic sphere. As an example, we may recall some fragmentary architectural terracottas dated to the second quarter of the sixth century BC and belonging to a public building located in the settlement of Poggio Buco. In a mythical scene of abduction on the fragmentary plaques, at least three female personages may be discerned fleeing while raising the hems of their dresses with one hand, and a male torso leans forward toward a female torso (*c*. second quarter of the sixth century BC; Bartoloni 1992: 20–25). In a pedimental group on the temple of Celle at Falerii, dated to the first half of the fourth century BC, the line is further blurred. The terracotta group, unfortunately extremely fragmentary and of much-debated interpretation, may represent, according to F. H. Massa Pairault, the hero Halesus "founder of Falerii . . . in his erotic encounter with the local nymph," an episode conjured up to link the foundation of an Italic city with a ritual of marriage, like that otherwise known for the founder of Tibur and the nymph Albunea (Massa Pairault 2006: 247).

In the ritual acts preparatory to marriage it has been hypothesized that textile implements, as a symbol of female labor, could take on the function of an *ex voto* (Gleba 2009: 70, 74). In fact, Minerva and Uni are included among the main recipients of these gifts, the first surely as the tutelary deity of weaving, although in some forms of her cult, as attested for example in the sanctuaries of Caere-Punta della Vipera (Tomassucci 2005) and of Veii-Portonaccio, she was also venerated as protector of the reproductive power of the young (Colonna 1987a: 430) and of *wedded fertility* (Torelli 1982: 126). Uni, instead, is the model wife and consort of the greatest male divinity. Even more so than the Greek Hera, she is associated with the reproductive sphere (Torelli 1986: 207) and is sometimes depicted during the wedding ceremony, as on a mirror dated around 340 BC on which she appears as a couple with Tinia, who clasps her waist while a standing female figure holding an alabastron (small container for unguents) attends the scene, which is completed by a cylindrical container with its lid lying on the ground (Zimmer 1995: 27–28, n. 20). Another goddess who appears frequently on mirrors, objects strongly linked to women's world and more indirectly to the matrimonial sphere, is Turan the "Lady," depicted, for example, as a witness to amorous encounters or to scenes of dressing very often attributable to the marriage rite, as in an example, of unknown provenance, of a toilette scene connected with the Judgement of Paris. In this mirror, preserved in the Indiana University Art Museum, several deities, among them Turan, Uni, and Menerva, assist a female figure, probably Helen (*c*.300 BC; De Puma 1987: 18–20, n. 4). The goddess, sometimes herself the protagonist of such scenes, can appear accompanied and assisted by female figures variously related to the spheres of love and fertility, of birth, or of the rearing of children. Among these, Thalna is attested particularly often, a distinctive character in the Etruscan imagination from at least the end of the fifth century and recurrent in the iconography of the mirrors (Camporeale 1960).

Other divinities bound to the marital realm also seem to be involved in prenuptial rituals, for example, a loom weight from Roselle bearing the inscribed name "Vei" (Ambrosini 2000: 149, 154–159), the eponymous deity of the city of Veii. She protects the most important passages of female life (Carosi 2008) and seems to be involved in rites of fertility and purification attributed to the Cannicella sanctuary of Orvieto, with an assimilation between this Etruscan

goddess and the Latin Bona Dea (Colonna 1987b: 22–23). The name Vei is reproduced on two terracotta uterus models from the site of Fontanile di Legnisina at Vulci (Comella 2005: 47). The goddess will be assimilated during the Roman era into Demeter or Kore (Persephone).

In addition to the textile instruments, other utensils such as children's toys may have been offerings to the divinities especially associated with the sphere of fertility (Torelli 1984: 137), likewise terracotta reproductions of male and female genitals, perhaps related to a ritual of "preventive purification" for the conjugal union (Camporeale 2004: 48). The same purpose must have been served by the sacrifice of a piglet, as handed down in the literary sources:

> In fact it seems that animal sacrifices began with pigs. There are traces in the fact that in initiations into the cult of Ceres piglets are immolated and in the ceremonies of signing peace treaties, when the agreements are signed, they kill a pig, and in the beginning of the wedding rite of ancient kings and of Etruscan persons of high rank, to enter into marriage the new couple sacrifice a piglet.
>
> *(Varro* De re rustica *2.4.9, authors' translation here and below)*

In the contexts of extra-urban sanctuaries, for which a specific valence of *sexual and socio-legal promotion of young persons* has been recognized (Colonna 1987a), pits and pools have sometimes been linked with the *loutron nymphikòn*: that is, the bath by which the girl would acquire the *charis*, which was a prelude to marriage (Menichetti 2008: 222). For example, the little temple of Valle Zuccara at Caere was founded near a spring probably dedicated to a divinity analogous to the Latin goddess Anna Perenna, a figure associated, at least originally, with the sexual sphere of female initiation rites, which preceded and prepared women for marriage (Torelli 1984: 66; Capanna 2006).

Gilda Bartoloni

The wedding ceremony

Many objects, especially architectural terracottas, sarcophagi, urns, and mirrors, depict key moments in the wedding: the procession, the symbolic covering of the couple with a veil, and the *dextrarum iunctio inter coniuges*, namely the act of joining the right hands of the newlyweds. The ritualized transfer of the bride in a cart from her father's house to the new post-wedding home is in particular one of the gestures most widely documented in the iconography. In some versions, the model selected is that of the *hieros gamos* (Greek: "sacred marriage," a union of god and goddess, or human imitation of same), which evidently reflects a custom consolidated in royal society. In the terracotta frieze plaques of palaces and temples of the series "Rome-Veii-Velletri," for example, the emblematic married couple in the cart have been recognized as Dionysos and Ariadne (Sommella Mura 1977: 68–83), the epitome of eternal conjugal love, in which tenderness and sensuality are combined (Vatin 2004). On the plaques, dated between the third and fourth quarters of the sixth century BC, variously interpreted and already traced to an episode of *hieros gamos*, there are depicted two converging processions, each with a *triga* (three-horse chariot) and a *biga* (two-horse chariot) with winged horses, preceded by a herald. One of the processions contains only male figures, while in the other the long robe seems to reveal the presence of at least two female figures (Menichetti 1994: 96–102; Torelli 1997: 89–98, 106. On the plaques, see Sommella Mura 1977: 68–83; Fortunelli, S., in *Roma* 2008: 263. For the role of Dionysos in wedding iconography, see also Menichetti 2006: 60–61).

In some cases, on urns and sarcophagi, it is difficult to determine whether the cart procession is evoking a wedding ceremony or funeral rites, or whether it celebrates both, as basic moments of passage in life. On the short sides of the older of the two Vulcian sarcophagi with double effigies held in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts there appear, respectively, two women in a cart with a parasol and one man who climbs into a *biga* (Marthà 1889: 357–358; Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: 140, n. 208; Torelli 1997: 64, fig. 52). On the lids of both sarcophagi, attributed to two married couples of the Tetnies family, belonging to the same line of male descent, is depicted instead the covering of the couple with the veil, another crucial part of the wedding ritual. On the lid of the more recent sarcophagus (340 BC), especially, the dead couple are lying, nude and embracing each other under a mantle (Figure 56.1); while on the long sides of the chest are reproduced respectively a scene of Amazonomachy and a heroic battle; on the short sides appear two pairs of lions and griffins in the act of biting, on one side a bull and on the other a horse (Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: 140, n. 209).

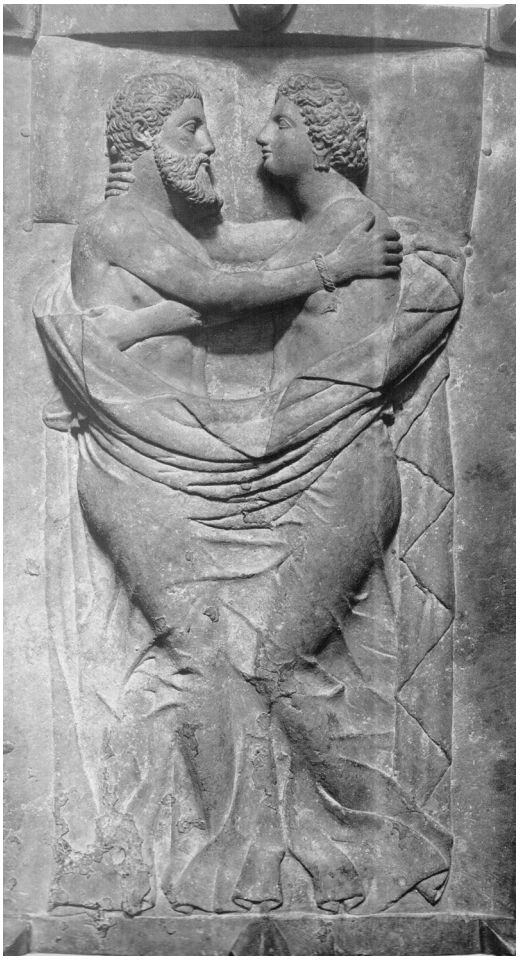

Figure 56.1 Married couple covered with veil. Sarcopghagus from Vulci. (From Sprenger, Bartoloni 1983, scheda 209.)

Figure 56.2 Episode of *dextrarum iunctio* (married couple clasp right hands). Sarcophagus from Vulci. (From Bartoloni and Pitzalis 2011a, p. 41.)

A statement of Aristotle (Athenaeus 1.23d.) and some iconographic models have raised doubts that the covering of the spouses with a veil actually extended to the banquet couches, although it is possible that these cases also constitute a metaphorical allusion to the marriage bond. Examples appear in a Chiusine alabaster urn in which the man holds a patera with his left hand and rests his right hand on his wife's shoulder (middle decades of the fourth century BC; Maggiani 1993: 159, table VII), and on a terracotta urn with an elderly married couple, from Volterra (end of second to beginning of first century BC; Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: 160, nos. 286–287; Camporeale 1986: 269, fig. 229).

The *dextrarum iunctio* is instead the act by which the couple join hands to symbolize their ratification of the pact. To illustrate this, there is again one of the Boston sarcophagi, the older of the two (370–360 BC). In the low relief of one long side may be discerned, to either side of the couple, objects evidently associated with the ceremony, among which are a fan, a lyre, and a parasol to the side of the wife, and a *lituus* (symbol of religious or political office), a folding stool, and a trumpet beside the husband (Figure 56.2). Such objects are present in part in one of the more controversial types of the sixth-century architectural plaques from Murlo, interpreted by some scholars as a scene of *hieros gamos*: the figural scene depicts a series of personages armed in this case with very specific attributes, among which are a *lituus*, a fan, a situla, (incense bucket) and a double axe, with some figures on foot and others seated on stools, and one veiled female figure on a throne (Rathje, A., in Stopponi 1985: 122–123; Lacy, L. R., in Stopponi 1985: 125, nos. 417–424).

Still in reference to the celebration of marriage, it is possible that some objects with strong female connotations such as, at first, spindles and distaffs and in a later period, *cistae* and mirrors (Massa Pairault 2000; Menichetti 2006), constituted wedding gifts, as supported by the testimony of Pliny:

> Marcus Varro reports having seen that in the temple of Sancus there was still in his day the wool on a distaff and on a spindle of Tanaquil, the woman who was also

> called Gaia Caecilia; he reports that in the temple of Fortuna there was preserved the royal *toga undulata* that had been worn by Servius Tullius, made by the same woman. From this was derived the tradition that a decorated distaff and a spindle with thread on it should be carried in the wedding procession of virgin brides.
>
> *(Pliny,* Natural History *8.194)*

Latin tradition attributed to Tanaquil the custom for girls to wear, the night before their wedding, the *tunica recta*, a garment made from a single piece of cloth: "Tanaquil was the first to weave a straight tunic, like those which, along with a toga devoid of any ornaments, are worn by a young man or a young new bride" (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.194–195). During the ceremony, the heads of Etruscan brides, and also of Latin brides, had to be almost constantly crowned, probably with laurel, and also veiled. Besides the woman seated in the cart in the procession scene (Figure 56.3) and the enthroned female figure in the so-called assembly scene in the Murlo frieze plaques, there also appear, for example, the deceased woman seated at the feet of her husband and portrayed in the act of *anakalypsis* ("unveiling") on the lid of an alabaster urn with double effigy from Città della Pieve-Bottarone, dated to the end of the fifth century BC (Cristofani 1975: 44, scheda 19, tav. XXXVII; Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: 132–133, no. 191; Camporeale 1986, fig. 197; Maggiani 1993: 160–161), and, from the first half of the second century BC, Larthia Seianti, reclining partially upright on the lid of a terracotta sarcophagus from Chiusi-Poggio Cantarello (Sprenger and Bartoloni 1983: 156–157, nos. 270–271; see Swaddling, this volume). A striking example of covering the head with a veil is represented on a mirror of unknown provenance kept in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. On it a draped female image, perhaps Turan, helps a nude male figure, probably Adonis, in the act of *anakalypsis*, uncovering *his* head (*c*.400–350 BC; De Puma 1993: 46, n. 27).

Funerary archaeology probably furnishes us with clues to this practice by the location of some fibulae on the top of the head of deceased women's bodies, as noted especially for the Latin necropolis of Castel di Decima (Bartoloni *et al*. 1982: 260). The widespread evidence, always in burials, of metal spirals for the locks of hair might also be associated with the *seni crines*, which are the braids parted in the middle by the *hasta celibaris* (a ritual spear) to frame the face (Torelli 1984: 34). Beginning in the mid-fourth century, there spread over

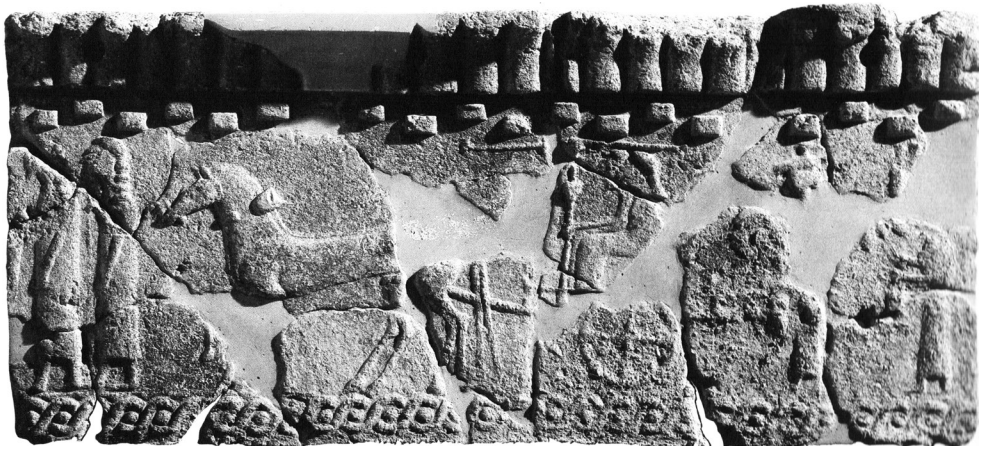

Figure 56.3 Procession with cart. Frieze plaques from Murlo. (From AA.VV., *Rasenna*, 1986, fig. 507.)

central Italy a type of female votive head characterized by a hairstyle arranged in two or three rows of curls parallel to the sides of the face and gathered into a net made of ribbons. Some of these veiled votive heads found in Hellenistic deposits have been hypothetically attributed to *nubendae* (brides about to marry; Olivieri 2005: 183). The head of Penelope also appears to be veiled, evidently perceived in Etruria as a figure paradigmatic of the condition of the bride: she is portrayed thus, for example, on a mirror of unknown provenance conserved in Mainz: she is seated with her head covered by a long veil, beneath which her long hair is loose while in front of her stands a female figure (last quarter of the fourth century BC; Höckmann 1987: 54–56, n. 31).

Marriage and motherhood

The importance that Etruscan society evidently recognized for marriage is closely connected with the great value attributed to lineage and thus to the power of procreation. The destiny of a woman is fulfilled by marriage only as it is the obligatory passage into legitimate motherhood, subject to family control. Unfortunately, this value does not find a proportionate response in the archaeological record and, at least in the earliest phases of Etruscan history, it is perceived only in the presence, in many female and infant tombs, of pendants which reproduce the forms of divinities or the symbols connected in various capacities with the protection of fertility, of childbirth, and of children. These include the amulets in amber, with nude female figures, especially associated with little crouching monkeys that were widespread especially at Veii and in the centers most affected by its influence (Negroni Catacchio 1989: 66; Michetti 2007: 160 and 164), or the figurines of Egyptianizing type, among which are the god Bes, the god Ptah, the child-god Nefertum, and the lion-headed goddess Sekhmet, the last two types documented especially in the Tarquinian "Bocchoris Tomb" dated between 700 and 690 BC (F. Sciacca in *Bologna* 2000: 294, with bibliography).

In addition, it is now generally accepted that the large, flat metal circles with rich incised decoration, held in place by a fibula over the abdomen of Latin women of high rank, buried during the Early and Middle Orientalizing period, are to be interpreted as emblems of their distinguished lineage (Bartoloni 2008: 30–34, and references therein; see also Bonfante, this volume). In the few reported cases, the age of the deceased women so honored with this ornament seems to correspond to full maturity between the ages of 30 and 40. Although distant both chronologically and especially geographically, a particularly telling comparison may be made with the princess of Vix, who died aged around 33 to 37 years and was buried with a large metal ring over her abdomen (Rolley 2003).

Although the written sources and the archaeological documentation thus provide us with the image of the Etruscan woman engaged in many aspects of social life, the aspects of wife and of mother remain without a doubt the principal female roles of all women regardless of rank.

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