

Etruscan Studies

12

2008-2009



Eroi Etruschi e Miti Greci: gli affreschi
della Tomba François tornano a Vulci.

Anna Maria Moretti Sgubini, (ed.)

(Florence, 2004)

Catalogue of an exhibition of the frescoes from the François Tomb in Vulci, Castello della Badia, 26 giugno-26 settembre 2004. Organized by the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, the Soprintendenza per I Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale, and the Comune di Montalto di Castro e Comune di Canino. Florence: Edizioni Cooperativa Archeologia, 2004.

by Jocelyn Penny Small

The frescoes from the François Tomb in Vulci, discovered in 1863, were detached from their tomb and removed to the private collection of the Torlonias in Rome with the result that they have rarely been accessible to scholars much less to the general public. Yet in 2004 they were the subject of two exhibitions, one in Hamburg at the Bucerius Kunst Forum (February 13, 2004 – May 16, 2004) and the other in the Museo Archeologico in Vulci. Even more wonderful is the plan to put them on permanent display in an “archaeological park” in Vulci. Before the frescoes were displayed, the ZEIT Foundation in Germany, in cooperation with the Italian authorities, supported an extensive restoration of them that included a major cleaning, new backing and supports, etc.

The catalogue, which accompanied the Italian exhibition, contains an introduction and ten essays covering all aspects of the François Tomb: its discovery, modern history, the tomb itself, the frescoes, the current restoration, and the proposal for its permanent home. For the most part the essays are of an introductory nature and generally lack specific references, although they do include individual limited bibliographies. In other words, if one is interested in more than an overview, then one must consult the catalogue which accompanied the exhibition of the frescoes in 1987 at the Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, as well as the extensive bibliography on the tomb.¹ The essays do not have internal references to each other – not even references to helpful pictures elsewhere in the cat-

alogue – even though they sometimes overlap, especially on the modern history of the tomb. Nor is there an index. That said the catalogue does provide a quick and good synopsis of its topics.

Bernard Andreae presents an admirable summary of the subjects of the various frescoes, but frustratingly does not include notes. In particular, he accepts Cornelia Weber-Lehmann's new interpretation of Arnza, the small, chubby figure kneeling beside Vel Saties, as the son of Vel Saties. Hence the scene is not one of augury, as is commonly held, but instead one of daily life similar to that on contemporary fourth century BC Attic reliefs where birds appear as pets. Since Weber-Lehmann has written extensively on Etruscan tomb painting, finding the reference is not easy except for the fact that Adriano Maggiani, who does not accept the interpretation, gives the full reference in the following essay.²

Maggiani's essay on the fragments of the Vulci frescoes in Florence is a model I wished the other contributors had followed. It satisfies both the lay person and the scholar. While the fragments are small and scruffy, they are, nonetheless, important for understanding some of the less well-known and less well-preserved parts of the frescoes. In particular, Maggiani is able to add substantially to our understanding of the panel to the right of the doorway to Room V. Vel Saties and Arnza on the left panel appear to be complemented by another Arnza and another standing man who holds a pomegranate bough. Andreae (55) interprets them as an ancestor of Vel Saties with the ancestor's son, another Arnza. Maggiani leaves the question open. The two also disagree on the gender of the lower half of the figure remaining on the lower half of the filled-in doorway that separates the two Arnzas. Andreae (55) believes it is "probably the wife of Vel Saties, the mother of the little Arnth [sic]"; while Maggiani (60) interprets the figure as perhaps the father of the founder and also as the one buried in Room V. Only Andreae (56) specifically dates the frescoes: 320-310 BC.

What distinguishes the catalogue most are the plentiful color illustrations. Particularly notable are two of the pictures accompanying the technical notes on the restoration. Both photographs – one of the crowning molding with animal frieze (page 69 fig. 53) and the other of Nestor (73 fig. 55) – were taken with parts cleaned and uncleaned. The amount of grime removed is striking. Francesca Maletto and Isabella Righetti point out (71) the hatching now visible on the back of Nestor's neck. Since the modeling previously visible used shading, for example on the legs of the Greek warrior with the Trojan Prisoner, this discovery is important.

Despite the extensive illustrations, including two fold-out plates of the scenes on the long walls of the "tablinum" out of numerical sequence following page 39, it is difficult to tell what are the "true" colors of the frescoes. For instance, three segments of the crowning frieze of animals and perspective meander appear on page 43 (figs. 25-27) with two different sets of colorations. The top two segments are shades of orange and brown, while the bottom appears in bluish-gray to reddish-brown. Complicating the issue for the person who has not seen the originals is that the nineteenth century Ruspi facsimiles for the meander portray it with yet a third set of colors (red-brown background, ivory for the light-struck portions of the meander and grey for those in shadow).³ It is impossible with-

out actually seeing the fresco to tell which, if any, is accurate. I can say, however, that the pictures of the reconstruction of the tomb from its display in the Bucerius Kunst Forum (41 figs. 21-23) match the online photographs.⁴ It is notable that the top of the crowning molding with its horizontal “eggs” appears in lurid shades of pink and purple, while it is brown, yellow, and blue in the Ruspi facsimile.⁵ The catalogue seems pleasantly free of typos, etc. except for the curiosity that in Andreae’s discussion of the Rape of Cassandra he presents her name in Etruscan as “csntra”, when the accompanying picture (47 fig. 33) clearly shows it to contain an “a” (“casntra”).

In short, this is a useful catalogue, especially for its photographs of less well-known parts of the frescoes. The essays give good overviews of their topics, but the scholar needs to look elsewhere for full discussion and documentation.

Jocelyn Penny Small
 Department of Art History
 Voorhees Hall
 71 Hamilton Street
 New Brunswick, NJ 08901
 jpsmall@rci.rutgers.edu

NOTES

1. Francesco Buranelli, ed. 1987. *La Tomba François di Vulci* (Rome).
2. Cornelia Weber-Lehmann. 1999. “Die Auspicien des Vel Saties: ein Kinderspiel, Etruskische Selbstdarstellung im Spannungsfeld zwischen römische Politik und griechische Lebenswelten” in *Proceedings of the XVth International Congress of Classical Archaeology*, 449-453. Amsterdam.
3. Horst Blanck and Cornelia Weber-Lehmann, eds. 1987. *Malerie der Etrusker in Zeichnungen des 19. Hunderts*, 215, fig. 207. Mainz am Rhein..
4. <http://www.buceriuskunstforum.de/indexe.html>. Select No. 5 (“The Etrucians [sic]”) and then slide the horizontal scrollbar to the right until the François Tomb appears. Viewed on June 10, 2005.
5. Blanck and Weber-Lehmann, 214, fig. 206.