Nigel SPIVEY and Simon STODDART, Etruscan Italy (London 1990).

VI
RITUAL

It is probably the profane tenor of twentieth-century existence that induces us to imagine that the material remains of an ancient society will tell us whatever we want to know about that society. Only a very foolish archaeologist would claim, however, that a structure of beliefs can be dug up from the ground. Archaeology can encourage a certain at-homeness with the material expressions of belief, both minor and monumental, but beyond the basic establishment of sanctuary sites, and beyond the typologies of votive gifts and dedications made at such sites, we rarely achieve more than inklings as to the ideas and intentions underlying ancient ritual.

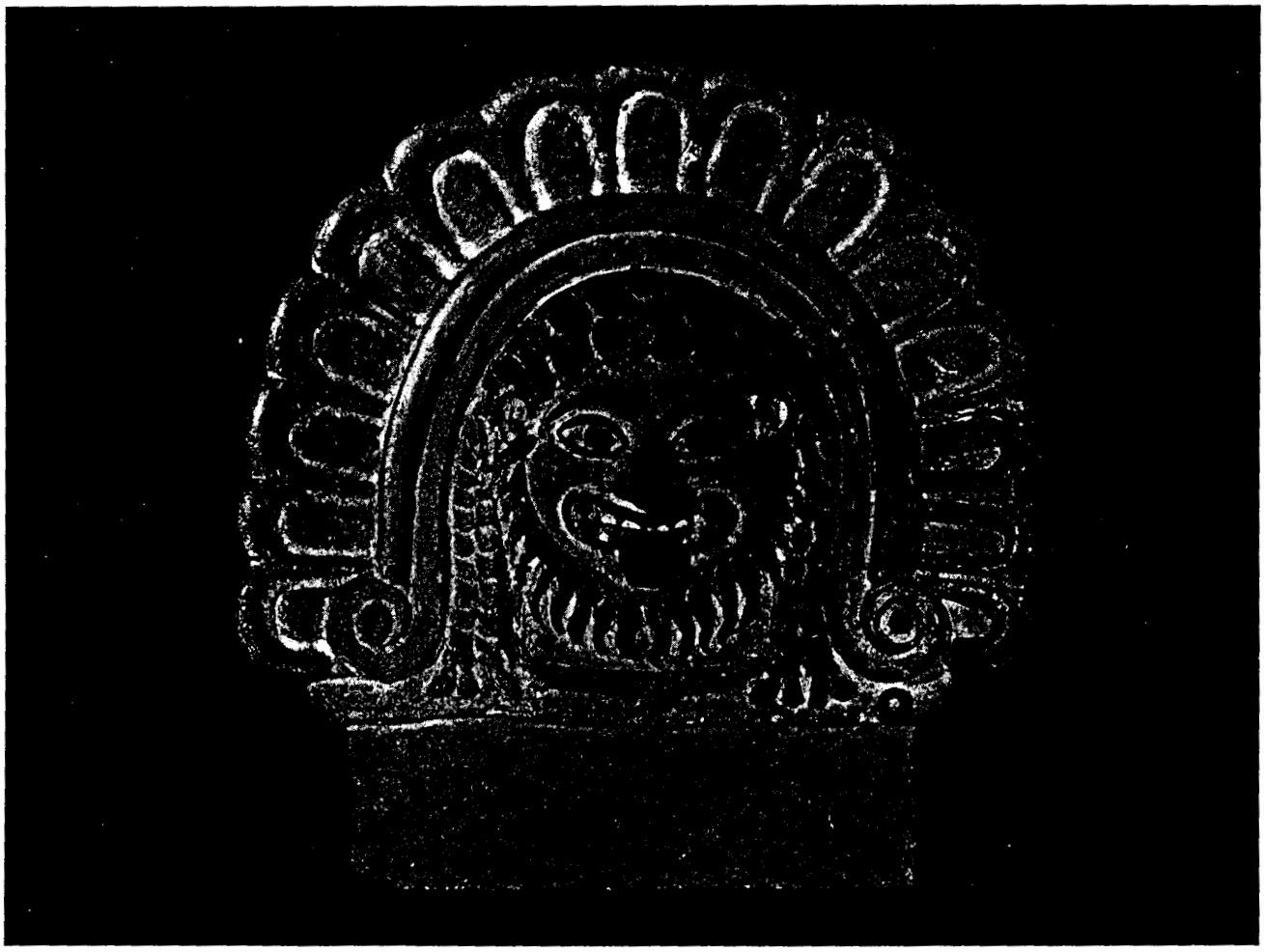
This admitted, we have a choice of approaches. We can take a consistently flippant or rational line: whenever we come across some image or building that perplexes us we can assume that if it is meaningless to us then it was originally meaningless. This approach is generally allied with an aloof, no-nonsense attitude towards metaphysics of any kind; it is the kind of approach exemplified by the young German archaeologist encountered at Tarquinia by D. H. Lawrence:

> 'He is a modern, and the obvious alone has true existence for him. A lion with a goat's head as well as its own head is unthinkable. That which is unthinkable is non-existent, is nothing. So, all the Etruscan symbols are to him non-existent and mere crude incapacity to think. He wastes not a thought on them: they are spawn of mental impotence, hence negligible.' (*Etruscan Places*, Penguin ed. 1950, p. 103.)

We do not know what progress this German scholar later made – he may have abandoned archaeology in favour of Logical Positivism – but his attitude is still shared by plenty of classical archaeologists. A related approach to this dismissal of meaning is more cynical: it involves consigning whatever excavated material that we do not understand to the sphere of ritual simply on the grounds that it is a mystery to us. Once consigned, there's an end on it: it is the hocus-pocus we have transcended, or else it is the exploitation of simple people by a cunning priesthood. A Marxist-inclined analysis of this type is attractive to those of a lazy intellectual disposition, and again plenty of present-day advocates might be cited.

Refusing to take these options – which are grossly dissatisfying whenever one meets them in action, or rather in inaction – requires us to shake off some of our twentieth-century enlightenment and make proper efforts of imagination. Limits upon what we can know should not impose limits upon our curiosity. In themselves, the archaeological remains of Etruscan ritual say little. We look upon the Gorgon's face (fig. 59) not as an image of the Gorgon but as an artefact: without imagination, we shall examine its moulding and colouring, the manner in which the ears and nostrils have been rendered; we shall compare it with other terracotta masks or antefixes of the region, or even of the Mediterranean world; we shall classify it, date it, exhibit it. We may name the workshop that produced it; we may even go on to identify the social factors involved in its production. But it would probably take a child to ask what is really the most important question: What does it mean?

The hurried adult reply is: 'It's *apotropaic*' – an image put up to ward off evil – but this is an incomplete answer. Is this the mask of the Gorgon, or a



59 *Temple (?) antefix of Gorgon's face, late sixth century* BC.

gorgon? Is it Medusa, freshly decapitated by Perseus? Why does an exposed tongue ward off evil? And if the image is frightening, why should one be frightened when approaching the place where it was mounted?

Finding answers to these and like enquiries is not simple, and the answers are not likely to be definitive. We are talking about things that we cannot touch, clean or classify. In the passage cited from Lawrence, what defies comprehension is literally the chimerical. If archaeology provides a sense of at-homeness with the past, it seems pernicious to insist upon the *otherness* of that same past by imaginatively exploring the rites of its religion, but this is precisely what we must do: admit the otherness, and seek to understand it as best we can.

The cities

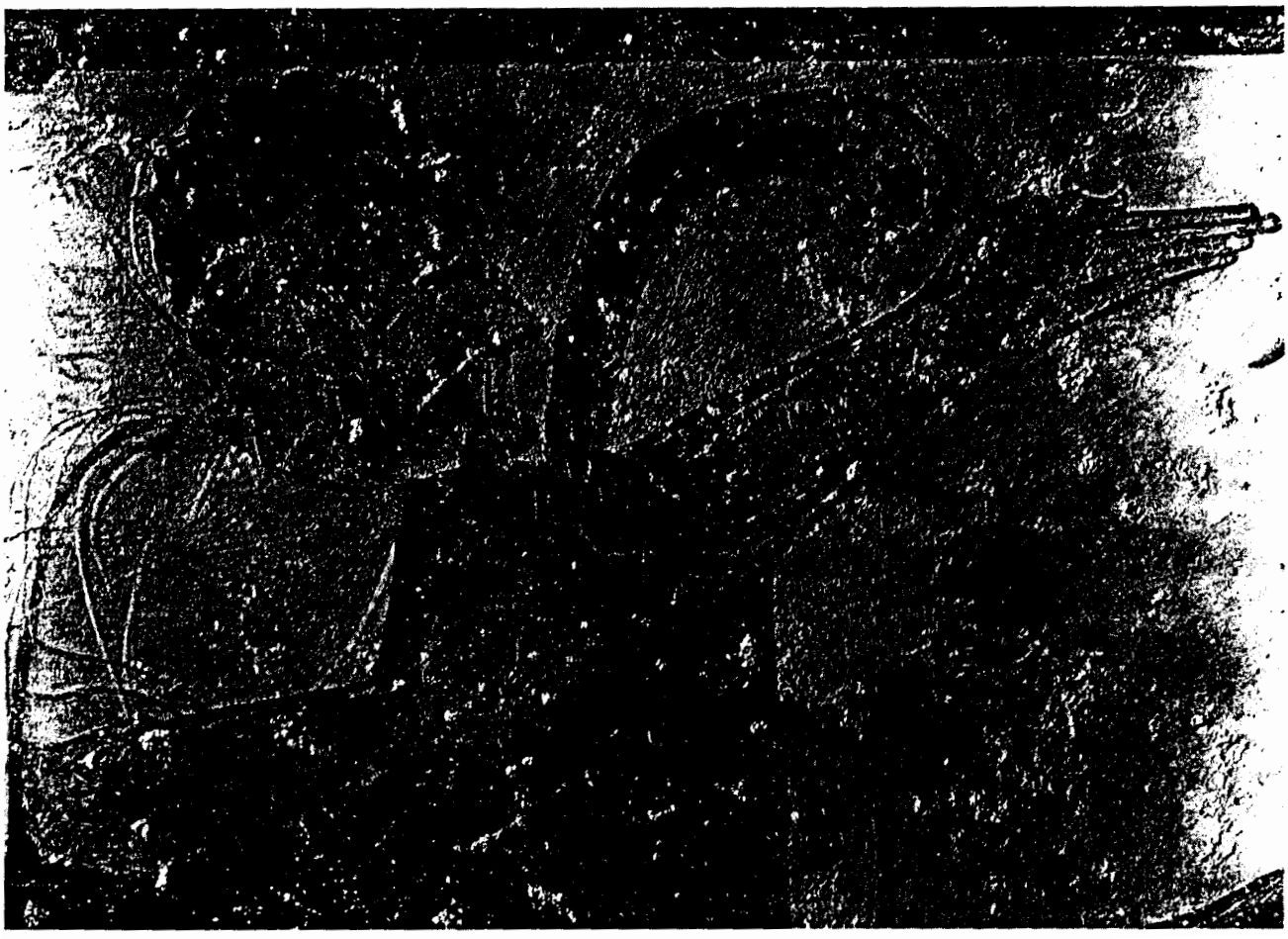
The archaeologist is bound to take the scope of ritual in terms of its dictionary definition: 'of, with, consisting in, involving, religious rites': no more and no less than what is implied there. It seems right to begin with the establishment of cities. When Romulus ploughed out the extent of his new city on the Palatine, he was believed to have been following the ritual practices of the Etruscans: certain procedures laid out in the *disciplina Etrusca* (the Etruscan religious system) which determined and sanctified a city foundation. This is not easily accommodated by the usual historical-geographical theories of the morphogenesis of cities, so what can archaeology do to substantiate Roman tradition?

We can glean some evidence from the 'iconography of power'; when political institutions are indentified with religion, they carry the icons of religious authority. It needs only superficial study

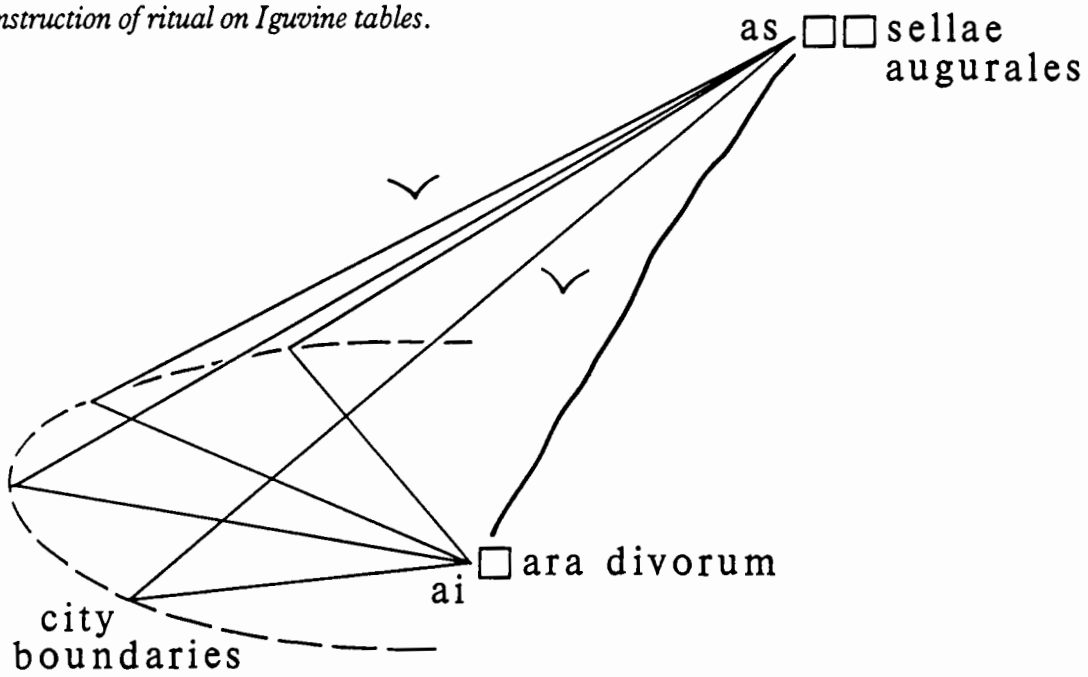
of Etruscan art to see how certain 'symbol systems' worked. The augurs, for example, carried long crook-staffs (fig. 60), so even when they are not depicted gesturing up at the flight of birds in their ritual stance, the presence of the staff is enough to invest them with a particular political-religious status. And it is these augurs who would have been responsible for the city foundation rituals. The nature of such rituals is possibly suggested by an extraordinary series of bronze tablets found at Gubbio in the fifteenth century and preserved there as 'The Iguvine Tables'. They are inscribed partially in Latin but mostly in a local Umbrian script akin to Etruscan: their date seems to be around the second century BC, but of course they may derive from much older documents.

Reading the Iguvine Tables is a grand game for philologists and fraught with uncertainties. It appears, however, that one section of the Tables does refer to the ritual protocol involved in consecrating a city. This has been read as follows: A fixed point of reference is made by the natural eminence, the *arx* (or, in Umbrian, *okri*) of the city. It is here that the augural stones or platforms (*sellae augurales*, or *vapersos avieklos*) are located, as well as the principal altar (*ara divorum*). These in turn furnish fixed points for the taking of an upper angle (*angulus summus*) and a lower angle (*angulus imus*). Hence the practice of augury: for the angles will be drawn according to the flightpaths of specific birds; the point where lower angles intersect with upper angles should then determine the sacred limits of the city. The city walls as such may matter less than the *pomerium*, the area immediately behind and beyond the walls (*post moerium*) in which no building was done and which in Latin terms marked the formal delimitation of magisterial powers. Figure 61 gives some idea of how this procedure looks in diagram form. The reader will appreciate how ab-

60 *Augur (detail of the Tomb of the Augurs, Tarquinia,* c. *510* BC).



61 *Reconstruction of ritual on Iguvine tables.*



as angulus summus
ai angulus imus
⌄ bird flight

stract this seems and will perhaps feel incredulous that a city's boundaries can be determined by a combination of pure geometry and bird-spotting. Two things should be borne in mind: first, that the maintenance of an ideal in city-building is perfectly congruent with a general failure to meet that ideal – true as much in Etruscan Italy as it was later in Renaissance Italy; and second, that the Iguvine Tables are retrospective documents. However they are interpreted, they still look like religious formalizations of a political *status quo* established in early-Roman Gubbio: in a sense they are themselves icons, probably made public or invoked only on special occasions.

The notion that ritual procedure can work in a retrospective way is important to our understanding of Etruscan cities within a landscape. It is quite clear that the foundations of most Etruscan cities lie not in the rites prescribed by the *disciplina Etrusca* but in the synoecism, or coming-together, of divers settlements on a single plateau. This is plainly the case at Tarquinia, and is becoming clearer at Cerveteri: beneath the large buildings currently being explored there are the circular remains of Villanovan period hut-houses. It is during the sixth and fifth centuries BC that an axial arrangement is imposed, a process mirrored in the principal necropolis of Cerveteri, the Banditaccia, where the large circular tombs of the seventh and early sixth centuries BC give way to regular 'streets' of tombs. It remains to be seen whether at Cerveteri the orientation of temples determines the orientation of streets; certainly it looks as if the large edifice currently being explored – probably a temple with three cellas, erected in an area of formerly domestic habitation – was deliberately set in alignment with the late-sixth-century BC 'Sanctuary of Hera', a good stone's throw to the north. The building is dated to *c.* 500 BC: is it the result of some ritual codification of the city of Cerveteri at that period?

Our best example of an 'ideal' city in Etruscan Italy, a city laid out from its inception according

to ritual conventions, is Marzabotto. Etruscan colonists from Chiusi or some other part of Central Etruria arrived at this small site on the River Reno, not far from Bologna (Felsina), towards the end of the sixth century BC. They built Marzabotto as a 'New Town' (see Chapter II), and the result, a neatly orthogonal layout, has been well-known ever since its excavation in the last century. Marzabotto is not unique: it is simply a very good example of the same 'ideal' planning that the Etruscans brought to Campania when they occupied Capua during the late sixth century BC. A miniature version of this orthogonal procedure is evident at the colonial foundation of Bagnolo S. Vito, near Mantua, as well as at the later city of Musarna in South Etruria, which is currently being excavated by French archaeologists. Interesting for our present purposes, however, is that at Marzabotto the points of alignment for the whole city (see Chapter II, fig. 25) are provided by the altars and temples on the *arx*, or acropolis, of the site. These cast the north-south orientation of the settlement and hence determine the pattern of roads and houses. Furthermore, excavators in 1856 are known to have found an isolated platform (now destroyed and cryptically referred to as Y), which stood on the highest point of the acropolis: this would be a good candidate for the *auguraculum*, the vantage-point from which the augurs took their signs.

Few Etruscan cities are known archaeologically, and indeed few are knowable, so we shall be excused if we cite, as further evidence for the ritual procedure of city foundation, the case of Cosa. Cosa is not an Etruscan town, nor even an Etruscan colony: it was built *ex novo* by Roman pioneers in 273 BC on a promontory south of the Etruscan port settlements of Talamone and Orbetello, and it is fair to assume that Etruscan city-founding ritual influenced its building. We find, amongst the very few buildings that can be identified as belonging to the first phase of the colony, a square precinct, cut into the highest point of the colony site, and an adjacent pit or crevasse. This platform, chosen for the panorama it affords, eventually becomes the foundation of the *arx* of Cosa, and the pit, which evidently served as a receptacle for sacrifices, determines the central point of the subsequent *capitolium* or temple, as its excavator notes, 'forcing upon its designers both adaptation to a steep and unbalanced site and a series of unusual adjustments of its approaches' (fig. 62). This would fit with what we have inferred at Marzabotto: that the establishment of the *auguraculum* is the ritualistic conception of the city, even when it causes difficulties for later development.

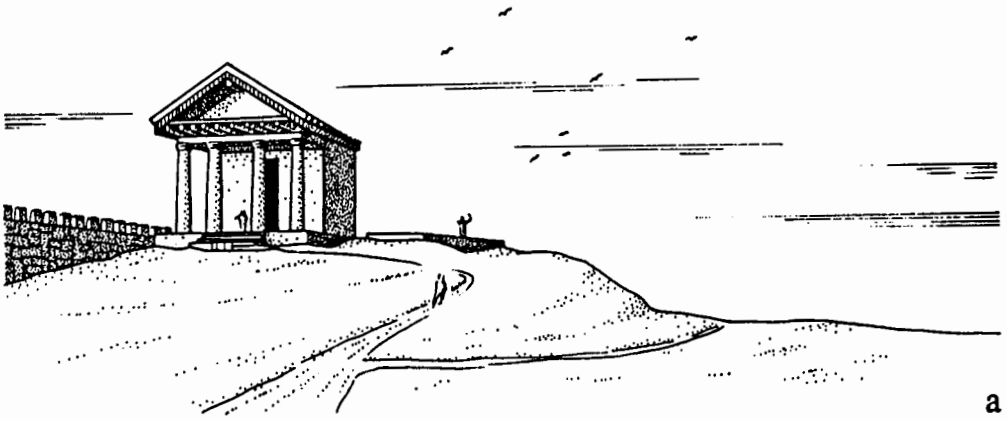
Within the city walls, sites of cult are not necessarily confined to a separate eminence that we might term as an acropolis, but temple buildings have been found to occupy the high points as a rule. This is the case at Veii (Piazza d'Armi) and Tarquinia (Ara della Regina). At Orvieto, no less than eight temples are attested inside the city boundaries, distributed more or less along the spine of the plateau and culminating with the Belvedere sanctuary, which – as its name suggests – commands impressive views from the north-east edge of the city.

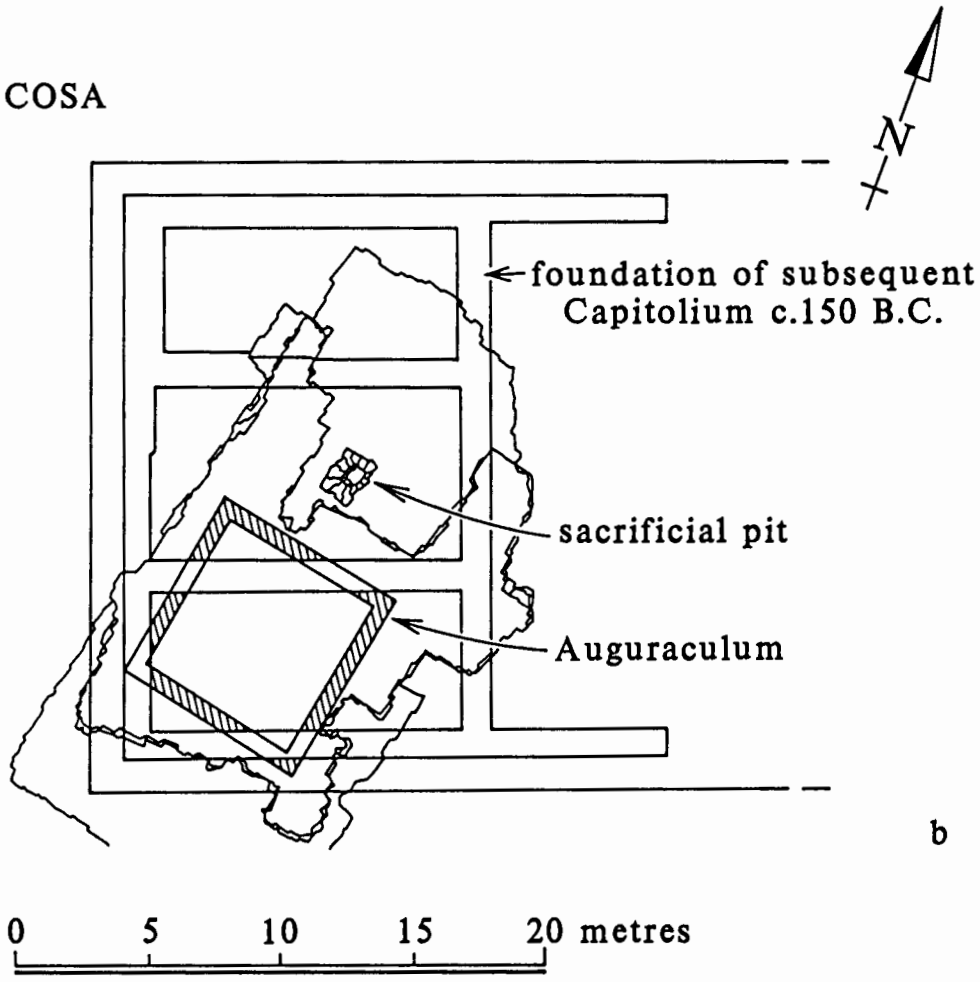
The cemeteries

The nature of such views leads us to an important consideration of the topography of Etruscan ritual. Those who go to the sites of Etruscan cities will realize that a certain pattern is operating. If one stands anywhere within the precinct of ancient Cerveteri – precincts now mostly occupied by the parochial vineyards – the view in every direction includes, quite conspicuously, the tombs of former inhabitants. Here Etruria strikes us as a landscape of commemoration. The effect is typically registered by George Dennis; this passage, taken almost at random, describes a visit to the site of Norchia:

> 'At length we turned a corner in the glen, and lo! a grand range of monuments burst upon us. There they were – a line of sepulchres, high in the face of the cliff which forms the right-hand barrier of the glen, some two hundred feet above the stream – an amphitheatre of tombs!' (*Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, London 1883, I, p. 196.)

This is still how Norchia strikes one, and of course the effect is heightened when nothing or little is left of the city and only the cemetery remains (fig. 63). The question that emerges is, was





62 *Arx at Cosa.* **a** *reconstruction;* **b** *plan (after Brown 1980).*

63 *The West cemetery, Blera.*

it the intended effect? Were the cemeteries intended to dwarf the cities, either physically or symbolically? Does the concept of *necropolis* bulk larger in the ideology of the Etruscan landscape than the concept of *polis*?

We can accept that the tombs outside Etruscan cities represent, in various ways, considerable investments of labour and other resources, but having accepted that a choice of interpretation faces us. In the case of the cliff-cut façades of sites like Norchia and Castel d'Asso, profane enlightenment sees nothing more than the expression of conspicuous urban consumption, families amongst an urbanized élite, competing with each other to produce the most impressive façade. It is not easy to see how this interpretation would work when applied to cemeteries such as those at Tarquinia or Vulci, where the investment in painted walls or Greek vases and other luxury items remains closed from general view. The stranger to Etruscan religion naturally cannot understand the sheer effort of these cemeteries, nor, probably, could the Romans. Pliny was outraged by the labyrinthine tomb set up by the legendary Lars Porsenna of Chiusi: it is all so much *vanitas*, or even lunacy (*vesana dementia*: see Pliny's *Natural History* Vol. XXXVI, 19, 91–3).

If we approach matters of ritual sympathetically, however, an alternative interpretation opens to us. Suppose these cemeteries to embody a genuine faith. Suppose the dead and buried to have their own dominion in Etruscan ideology, a dominion that can be physically located. Suppose the physical relationship between city and cemetery to be underwritten by a metaphysical structure: the relationship between *polis* and *necropolis*, between the society of the living and the community of the dead. At the risk of literally idealizing the past by appropriating or approximating the Etruscans to our own systems of metaphysics, this is what we shall here attempt.

In recent years there has emerged a self-styled 'archaeology of death', but its exponents have mostly shied clear of tackling mortuary rituals in Greece, Etruria and the Roman world. Moreover, it has rarely probed beyond death as a 'social event': so whilst analysing the ceremonial or formal behaviour of a given community, and interpreting the appurtenances of this formality or ceremony, it has failed to tell us much about actual eschatology – what really motivated those who behaved in this way, and what they conceived of the afterlife.

Recourse to anthropological theories proves more fruitful. This too has some bearing on social organization, given the implications of ancestralism – and remembering G. K. Chesterton's definition of tradition as 'the democracy of the dead'. For a proper understanding of ritual behaviour, an essential anthropological concept is that of *liminality*: literally, a being-on-the-threshold, a being-neither-in-nor-out. The importance of this concept, expounded and popularized by Sir Edmund Leach, has already been grasped by classical archaeologists, and its relevance to the study of cults of the dead will readily become apparent. For death is a rite of passage; or rather, it brings about a rite of passage. The act of funeral and burial is a ritual intended to assist the passage from one status to another: from the status of living person to the

64 *Etruscan black-figure vase,* c. *510* BC, *depicting a* prothesis. *The deceased is laid out on a couch: on a stool underneath are left the deceased's summer sandals and winter boots.*

status of deceased ancestor, from the society of the living to the community of the dead. The passage implies a period of liminality, of being neither one status nor yet the other. The Greeks, when they laid out a deceased person on a couch for a period of mourning prior to interring or incinerating the body, termed this rite the *prothesis*: it is their stage of liminality. There is evidence, both archaeological and iconographical, that the Etruscans organized something like the Greek *prothesis* (fig. 64). In certain cases (depending on social status) this period will have been accompanied by special and unusual events: *ploratores* (professional mourners) will have been called in (figs. 65, 66), and games and feasts laid on. Much of Etruscan art has been preserved in the context of tomb-decoration, and it is to be expected that the meaning of such art ultimately lies with Etruscan funerary rites.

Reading Etruscan funerary art is not always straightforward, however. The interpretation of the banqueting scenes frequently encountered in painted tombs at Tarquinia (and less frequently at Orvieto and Chiusi) is tricky because the meaning of the banquet changes over the three centuries during which it is depicted. In the fifth-century BC versions, it is clear that an outdoor and temporary setting to the banquet is intended, with many festooned drapes and garlands and patterned backgrounds indicating the texture and structure of a tent or catafalque. We, the onlookers, are meant to see the banquet held in honour of the deceased, celebrating the rite of passage, of which the painting offers itself as a permanent record. By the fourth century BC, however, these scenes of banqueting are taking on more symbolic meaning, as

65 *Grieving figure, from the Tomba del Pulcinella, Tarquinia* (c. 510 BC).

66 *Professional mourner, from the Tomb of the Augurs, Tarquinia. The inscription beside him reads* tanasar*: later we find the same word corresponding to the Latin* histrio, *'actor'*.

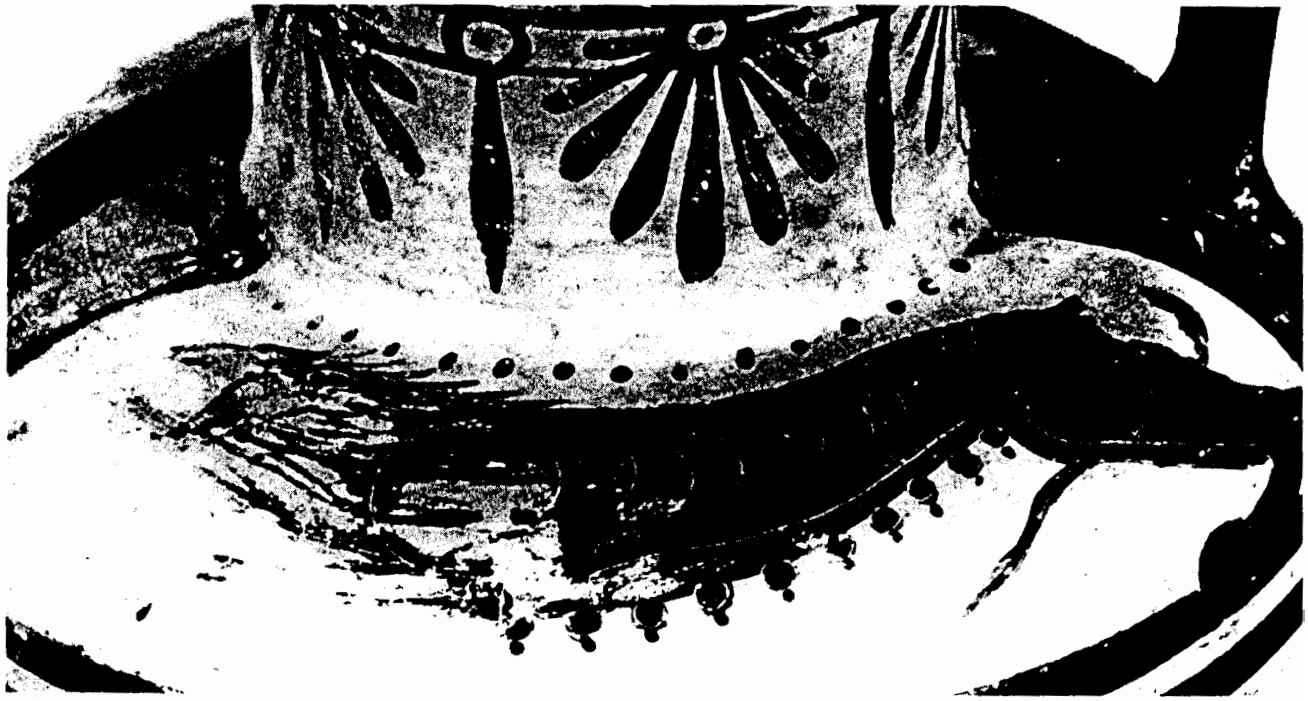
they include tokens of the underworld in anticipation of the arrival of the deceased there. In the Tomb of Orcus at Tarquinia, for example, the banquet is laid out under a pergola, but demons are in attendance; and as one passes into the ensuing rooms of the tomb-complex, it is like being in the Underworld. There is Cerberus the three-headed dog, there Sisyphus endlessly pushing his boulder, there Hades and Persephone; and beyond them, the Elysian Fields, the fine side of it: the pleasure of meeting with Theseus, Ajax, Agamemnon and Tiresias.

The differences in effect between the later and the earlier tombs have caused scholars to postulate changes in Etruscan eschatology over the period, but it is likely that beliefs regarding the afterlife changed less than the modes of painting. The most recently discovered painted tomb at Tarquinia has been christened the 'Tomb of the Blue Demons', and it indicates that the entry of demons took place before the end of the fifth century BC. And that should not come as a surprise, when we remember that the Greek painter Polygnotus, who in the early fifth century BC decorated the walls of the Lesche at Delphi with scenes of the trip made to the underworld by Odysseus, included in his depiction not only Charon the Ferryman but also a demon whose appearance corresponds closely to the Tarquinian sprites. As Pausanias describes it: 'His colour is between blue and black, like that of the flies that settle on meat.'

Tombs such as the Tomb of the Blue Demons and the Tomb of Orcus indicate the extent to which Greek imagery and terminology permeated the Etruscan cult of the dead. Those buried in the Tomb of Orcus – which was the family tomb of the Spurinna clan – believed, as Socrates is reported to have believed shortly before his end, that death

67 *(above) Multi-teated lioness/leopardess, from the Tomba delle Leonesse, Tarquinia* (c. 520 BC).

68 *(below) Multi-teated feline on an Etruscan black-figure vase*, c. 520 BC.



69 *Winged genitalia: from the Tomba del Topolino, Tarquinia* (c. 500 BC).

brought the chance to join the eternal community of past souls. The achieved status is by implication a heroized status. The characterization of heroized status may be done either with references to Greek epic (though names, of course, are transliterated into Etruscan) or by combining Greek mythical figures with celebrated men of Etruscan history (as evident in the paintings from the François Tomb at Vulci). The funerary process establishes the deceased as a figure of cult worship. It is a new status. And if many of the objects deposited in the tombs seem to us quaintly domestic – wine strainers, cups, plates – it is because such objects were installed in the tombs to mark not the finality of death but the beginning of a new type of life. Even heroes need to strain their wine.

The decoration of the Archaic tombs contains this message as much as the more sophisticated imagery of the later period. The symbols may be less direct but they are there. Take, for example, the depiction of multi-teated animals on a tomb-wall (fig. 67) and on a vase deposited in a tomb (fig. 68). These are not painted for caprice: they have obvious connotations of fertility. More specifically, they allude to the condition of infant growth and nutrition: the raising of new life. The alignment of death with fertility, the end of one life with the beginning of another, reaches its logical symbolic expression with the depiction of the phallus, often in stone at the entrance to a tomb or else painted inside (fig. 69). Death hereby becomes the beginning of a new cycle: copulation, conception and nutrition. What emerges is both an old and a new figure: the deceased takes on new status as an ancestor, heroized and then worshipped for the new heroized status.

Some Etruscan vases depict this epiphany. It appears like the Greek 'entry' (*anodos*) of the god Dionysos, like a head breaking up through the earth (figs. 70, 71). The Etruscan cult of the dead

70 *Etruscan black-figure* oinochoe: *note vertical row of teats along border, emphasizing the 'rebirth' of the venerated ancestor (whose head is rising from the ground).*

71 *Etruscan black figure* oinochoe, *early fifth century* BC: *the* anodos *of Dionysos? Note figure with vine or ivy strands acclaiming the rebirth.*

is a cult that transforms the dead into objects of veneration: the ritual creates from the dead a transcendent force that is both above society and at its very foundation.

The sanctuaries

If cemeteries are the locations for the cult of the dead (about which more will be said in Chapter VIII), then sanctuaries are the places where the living pay attention to their own earthly well-being.

This should very often be taken literally. The reasons for frequenting a sanctuary will include wanting a child, wanting a successful pregnancy, wanting to erase the pain of an arthritic limb, wanting a trouble-free voyage to Spain, and wanting to win a battle against another person, city or people. The invocation naturally involved some personal or collective cost.

It is a regrettable truism that the practical workings of even a well-excavated ancient sanctuary, such as Delphi, remain obscure to us. This is as true for Etruria as it is for Greece. We know that healing cults were practised at many sites; we know about the spread of the specific cult of Asclepius, especially in transapennine Etruria; we may even know which particular maladies were catered for at certain sites, thanks to patterns of votive material. What we do not know is just how much practical business was conducted at one of these sanctuaries: that is, whether it was residential, whether specialized physicians were available for consultation, and so on.

The range of sanctuary sites may be outlined according to a classification that seems to be becoming standard. This supposes three categories of sites: urban, extra-urban and rural. 'Extra-urban' is used to denote such sites of ritual activity as are located in the immediate environs of a city: Veii and Civita Castellana provide some good examples of this. Within this triple categorization (which is not terribly useful in itself) there are further variant factors. Along the coast there are cult sites associated with ports of trade, whilst inland the sanctuaries can be mapped according to road networks, water-sources and mountain tops. What constitutes a rural sanctuary is arguable: some of these 'rural sanctuaries', such as Monte Falterona and Brolio (both in Tuscany), are designated by virtue of deposits of bronze statuettes; others have altars or minor structures associated with them, such as Pieve Socana, to the north of Arezzo, and Grotta Porcina, near Blera; and others, such as Monte-

tosto, a large and as yet poorly-explored plateau site between Cerveteri and Pyrgi, rank as monumental. There is also the *fanum Voltumnae*, traditionally cited as the chief pan-Etruscan sanctuary and confederate forum-place: it is supposed to be situated near to Orvieto or Bolsena, but so far no decent archaeological evidence supports this location.

The most ubiquitous cult of the living in the ancient Mediterranean world generally is the cult of birth. In Etruscan Italy this conflates, as we have seen, with the cult of death, in so far as death may be seen as a form of rebirth; to some extent a similar conflation takes place in modern Italy. The image of *Madonna con bambino* (mother with child) carries much more symbolic value than the *Madonna del parto* (mother of the pregnancy), who is specifically invoked by expectant mothers. So it is difficult to place a number of artefacts: when we come across an urn from Chiusi that is surmounted by the figure of a woman cradling a child – a cinerary urn, used to contain the ashes of a deceased person – we must wonder whether this be the urn of a prematurely-deceased child or a more symbolic reference to new birth in the afterlife.

The Etruscan equivalent to the Madonna is Hera. As in the Greek world, Hera is much more than the wife of Zeus. She is often seen on Etruscan mirrors, suckling Herakles at her breast. Sometimes she seems to be labelled as Hera, as at her supposed temple in the city of Cerveteri; or else she appears in her proper Etruscan guise as Uni, as at Gravisca, where she is the recipient of many votive terracotta swaddled infant-effigies. These are also numerous at Capua and Cerveteri.

If not Hera, then it is the mother-goddess figure who receives the cult. Mater Matuta (as she is known at the sanctuary of the Latin settlement at Satricum and at other central Italian sites) often figures as a child-carrying image (*kourotrophos*): at Satricum the range of votives dedicated to her includes not only models of swaddled babies but also reproductions of cockerels, doves and pomegranates. Real gifts are recorded in the Greek equivalent to this cult: worshippers of the mother-goddess took to the cult site special cakes, pomegranates, birds and snakes.

The ambiguity of the votives should be noted. It

72 *Votive terracotta: couple with child.*

is not always clear whether the votive is intended as an image of the goddess or as an image of the human supplicant to the goddess. Some votives from Etruscan sites show a couple with a child between them (fig. 72): is this a couple with one child hoping for another or a couple projecting a desired state? Or indeed is it the image of a divine couple with their divine offspring? Other votives present few problems by getting down to the basics of midwifery: hence the simple models of the uterus (fig. 73). Some sanctuaries, however, do appear to relate more to death than to life: there are, for instance, a number of swaddled-baby figurines from the Castelsecco site near Arezzo and the extra-

73 *Votive terracotta: model of uterus.*

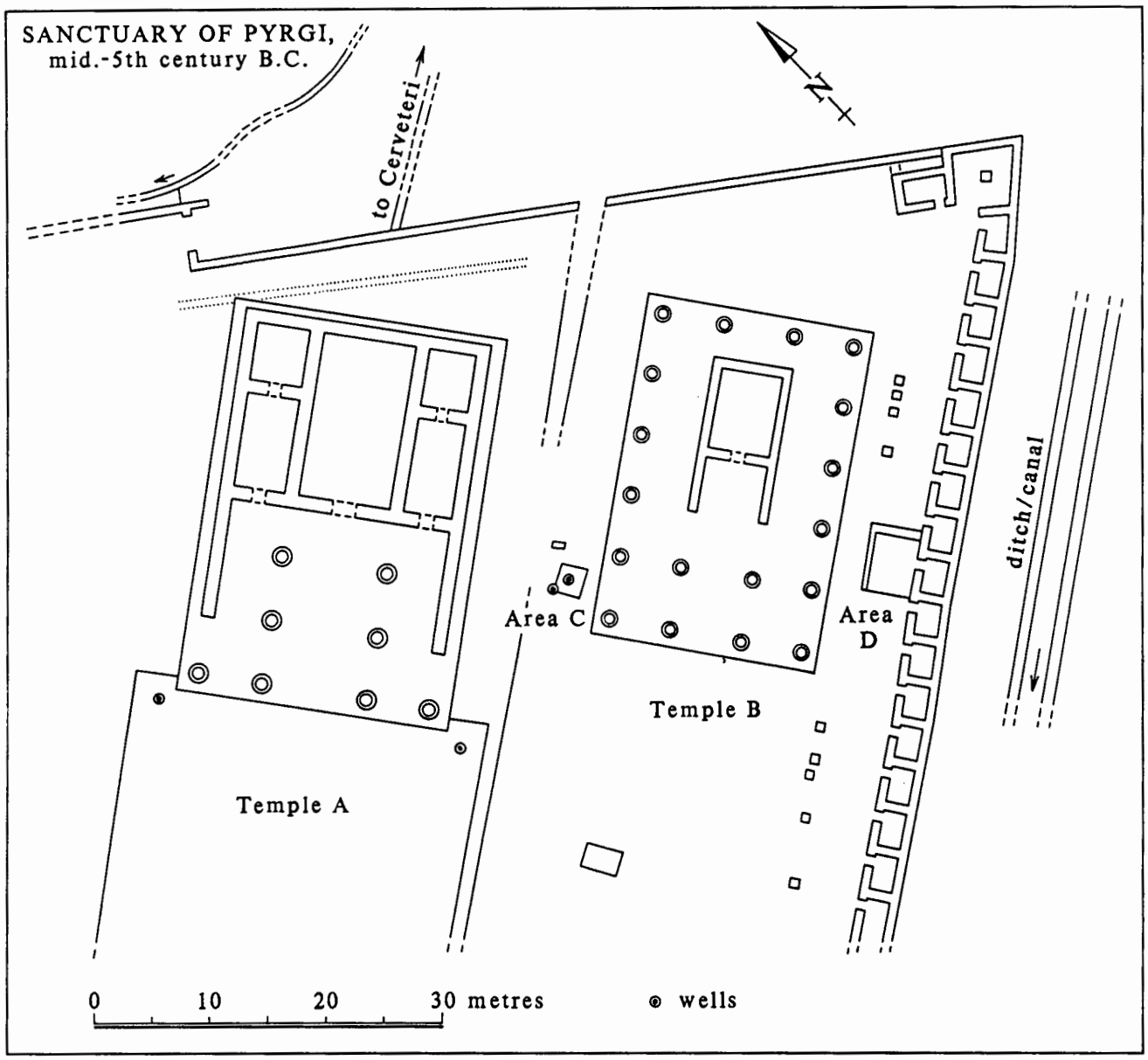
mural 'Oriental' sanctuary at Latin Lavinium that have mature adult faces and which must pertain to a chthonic cult. They were presented in the hope of securing rebirth for a deceased person. If Hera suckling the fully-grown Herakles is a model, then the hope is for immortality by divine adoption; this divine adoption leading to rebirth and immortality is a key theme of the cult of Dionysos, which has been traced as gaining credence in Etruria from the late sixth century BC onwards.

The sanctuary at Pyrgi

The best-known of Etruscan sanctuaries is Pyrgi. It has been under excavation for many years and is still producing surprises, even though the area adjacent to the sanctuary has yet to be properly explored. The site is coastal and is now half-swallowed by the Tyrrhenian Sea. Although some distance from Cerveteri, Pyrgi was linked to that city by a direct road and probably served as the principal port or *emporium* for Cerveteri and the Caeretan hinterland.

Pyrgi's importance lies not so much in its Etruscan character as in the fact that it was a cosmopolitan site. The key discovery came in 1964, when a triptych of gold laminate plaques bearing bilingual inscriptions was revealed. The two languages were not, as one might have expected, Etruscan and Greek but Etruscan and Phoenician: they attest the dedication of the Archaic temple (in fig. 74, Temple B) by Thefarie Velianas, ruler of Cerveteri, to Astarte (the Phoenician mother-goddess) and Uni (the Etruscan Hera). The dedication follows close on the first signs of monumental building at the site, in the second half of the sixth century BC: it is reasonable to suppose that the initiative for the building came from Cerveteri. The possible motives are varied: there may have been political motivation (sealing an alliance with the Phoenicians); commercial motivation (if Phoenicians traded on a regular basis at the port, they will have wanted a familiar place of cult); or it may have been bound up in some expiatory foundation (we are told by Herodotus, for example, that the Delphic oracle commanded the citizens of Cerveteri – Greek Agylla – to expiate for the crime of stoning to death on the shore a batch of Phocaean prisoners, prisoners taken, we may note, by a combined Etrusco-Phoenician force).

It is not unusual for a sanctuary to host more than one deity: hence it is not unusual for a sanctuary to perform a variety of cult functions. Pyrgi's history or prehistory as a cult site prior to the erection of Temple B is not clear, but its development between the early fifth and the late fourth centuries BC (it was annexed, along with the rest of the Caeretan coastline, by Rome in 273 BC) is providing much ground for discussion. The terracotta decorations to Temples A and B are arguably 'programmatic' in relation to cult practices. Amongst the votive material there are anatomical terracottas from the area of Temple A, suggestive of a healing function, and from the small area C (marked on fig. 74) there came numerous lanterns, which indicate

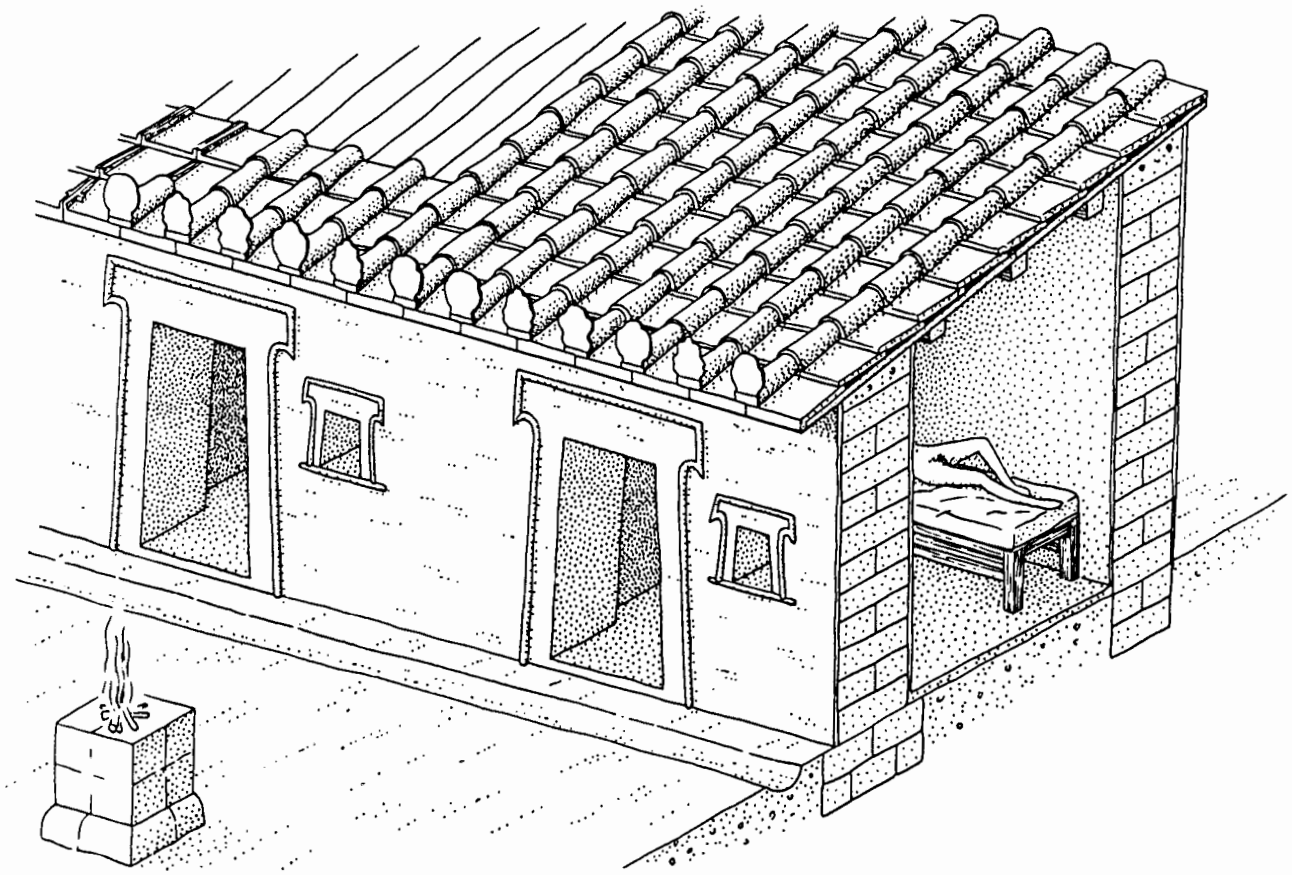


74 *Plan of temples at Pyrgi.*

some ritual conducted nocturnally. Throughout the sanctuary there have been plentiful finds of pottery cups and bowls, that is, small vessels for the pouring of libations.

While it is normal to think of a temple as the home of a particular deity, the fact that Pyrgi is a coastal and therefore cosmopolitan site should lead us to expect a considerable diversity of dedications. Ancient sources tell us that Pyrgi was variously the sanctuary of Leucothea, Eilithyia and Lucina. Dedications recovered from the sanctuary mention not only Astarte and Uni but also Thesan (the Etruscan Aurora), Tinia (the Etruscan Zeus) and Suri (presumably related to the Faliscan *pater Soranus*, father Soranus, the Apollo-god worshipped on Mount Soracte). If the ambiguities and connections between these deities seem complicated, it is only a reflection of the flexibility of the sanctuary: it was built to serve an international community.

The cult associated with Astarte should be understood in this light. Astarte shares sites with Aphrodite at Eryx (Erice) on the west coast of Sicily and at Kition on the southern coast of Cyprus. Aphrodite is a favourite cult goddess for major port sites around the Mediterranean: she was wor-



75 *Brothels at Pyrgi.*

shipped at Troezen, Piraeus (the port of Athens) and Naukratis, amongst other places. Most notoriously, she was worshipped at Corinth, and it now seems that what shocked St Paul at Corinth was also being practised at Pyrgi. As figure 74 shows, alongside Temple B (the temple dedicated to Astarte) there is a structure divided into multiple small cells. A charitable interpretation of these would be that they are shops, or perhaps hostel accommodation for those seeking a medical cure; but ports are never very salubrious places, and given that there is a Roman reference to the *scorta Pyrgensia* ('the Pyrgi harlots'), and given the presence of the Astarte-Aphrodite cult, it seems likely that the structure was a brothel of some official nature within the scope of the sanctuary. Figure 75 gives the excavator's idea of how these little love-nests may have looked.

The practice of a sacred prostitution, of course, is only one facet of the cult. A mariner may have gratified his lust after a long journey but we would also have paid thanks to Astarte with certain sacrifices. We cannot say precisely what these were at Pyrgi, but no doubt they were not unlike those at Kition, where an inscribed bowl records that the devotee to Astarte had his head shaved for her and sacrificed a sheep and a lamb in her honour.

Tarquinia: the sacred area of Pian di Civita

Once upon a time, in the district of Tarquinia, a field was being ploughed; and when the ploughshare at a certain point sunk deeper into the ground than usual, a figure sprang up from the earth and immediately began to speak to the farmer. This figure was Tages, who according to Etruscan tradition had the appearance of a boy but the wisdom of an aged seer. The peasant, unnerved by the sight, raised a crowd of witnesses, and soon virtually the whole of Etruria

> was gathered at the spot. They formed an eager audience for Tages, who addressed them on the art of soothsaying and haruspicy: and his exposition formed the basis of the written *disciplina* of the Etruscans, later added to and expanded by further experiences.

Thus wrote Cicero in his treatise on divination (*De Divinatione II, 23*) and in scornful tones, for this seems to him all so much bunkum (*refellenda*) – what holy being could appear in this bizarre way, and what man would lie under the clods waiting to be discovered? Quite: and what man could be killed on a cross and return to life? Cicero's pompous rationality is almost as foolish as the attitude of some archaeologists in searching for the site of Tages' appearance at Tarquinia ('the quest for the historical Tages'), but indeed the myth – which seems entirely aetiological, since the peasant at the plough is given the name Tarchon, and hence the role of founder of Tarquinia – has been invoked by those excavating the Pian di Civita area of Tarquinia city. This area, some 700 m (750 yd) downhill from what later figures as the acropolis of Tarquinia (the Ara della Regina temple, whose fourth-century BC foundations are still imposingly visible) was certainly given over to some ritual activity and in its ninth-century BC phase does feature a natural cavity, which it might be tempting to view as the site of the appearance of Tages. One might as well search for the rag with which Athena wiped her thigh clear of the semen of Hephaistos, and threw to the ground – producing Erichthonius, one of the cult figures of Athens: these myths were not meant for archaeological investigation, and in the case of the Pian di Civita we do not know what was the scope of the ritual practised there. We can, however, trace the essentials of what took place there. To the end of the ninth century belongs a sacrificial deposit within the afore-mentioned cavity. This included a quantity of sawn-off animal horns, and the skeleton of a child, probably about eight years old, probably a boy and probably suffering from epilepsy. The first buildings in stone are erected at the site at the beginning of the seventh century, including a rectangular enclosure about the cavity. The finds from this period are made up of numerous libation bowls, traces of further infant burials and some important bronze votive objects, including a trumpet and a 'killed' shield, that is, a shield deliberately crumpled up and rendered useless. At the begining of the sixth century, the buildings are extended to include a large altar and the hollowing out of another pit, 2 m (2.2 yd) in diameter. The cult continues with further traces of cut-off horn pieces and more infant burials.

The suggested cult figure here is Uni, whom we know to have been worshipped at the Tarquinian port of Gravisca. Only small scraps of epigraphical evidence support her nomination, but it is plausible enough: Uni as goddess of shepherds is an appropriate recipient of goat and ram horns; Uni as mother goddess will accept the 'exemplary corpse' of the diseased child or still-born infant. More interesting than the melodramatic discovery of 'human sacrifice', however, is the significance of the three bronzes: the axe, the trumpet (*tromba*) and the shield. These are precisely the 'icons of power' of which we spoke with regard to city-founding ritual. The axe is the symbol of the chief magistrate (which puts the *fascis* into Fascism); the embossed shield symbolizes the chief warrior; and the trumpet has a part-civic, part-military and part-religious function – an emblem of the power to call meetings, start battle or initiate rituals, like Piggy's conch-shell in *Lord of the Flies*. These are not from a tomb, 'killed' when their owner died: they must have dedications to an apposite divinity by some Tarquinian leader by way of thanks-offering, consecrations or placed there to bring good luck.