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Book Review

Dipingere l'Etruria: Le riproduzioni delle pitture etrusche di Augusto Guido Gatti

Edited by **Lucrezia Cuniglio, Natacha Lubtchansky, and Susanna Sarti.** Pp. 220, figs. ?. Venosa, Osanna Edizioni (*Archeologia Nuova Serie*) 2017. €50. ISBN 978-88-816-7516-6.

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To the legitimate question of whether it is really useful today to devote time and energy to flushing out, dusting off, and restoring old reproductions of Etruscan paintings, rather than using them to study directly what we have actually preserved of these paintings (on which so much remains to be done in Tarquinia, Vulci, Orvieto and Chiusi), this book brings very clear answers, as the antithesis of a possible symptom of a galloping etruscomania. This documentation, collected here from five different archival collections (210), proves to be invaluable in three main respects: firstly, on a scientific level, for the restitution of elements of the setting—sometimes fundamental for the comprehension of figurative scenes—that today are hardly visible or destroyed, or even entire graves, which have since disappeared (their number would be more than half of those available in the past) (S. Steingräber, *Etruscan Painting* [New York, 1986] 7); secondly, on a technical level, for knowledge about the survey and recording practices of draftsmen and artists of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century; and thirdly, historiographically, for the study of the forms of collaboration operating within the scientific and artistic milieu of the time. It is no coincidence, however, that this practice, although obviously obsolete, is the object of a renewed interest today that goes hand in hand with the exploitation of new technologies, as we shall see (recent contributions that appeared too late for consideration in the volume under review: M. Marzullo, *Grotte cornetane: materiali e apparato critico per lo studio delle tombe dipinte di Tarquinian*(*Tarchna*, Suppl. 6) [Milan, 2017]; M.

Marzullo, *Spazi sepolti e dimensioni dipinte nelle tombe etrusche di Tarquinia* (*Tarchna*, Suppl. 7) [Milan, 2017]; A. Capoferrro and S. Renzetti (eds.), *L'Etruria di Alessandro Morani: riproduzioni di pitture etrusche dalle collezioni dell'Istituto svedese di Studi Classici a Roma* [Florence, 2017]).

The main protagonist of this volume, the Florentine Augusto Guido Gatti (1863-1947)—on whose biography it might have been appropriate to devote a separate chapter (especially since he was not given an entry in the reference publication *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, published by the *Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana*)—was, however, far from being a precursor. Nearly a century before Gatti, in 1831, the Roman painter Carlo Ruspi (1798–1863) began to work on the reproduction of Etruscan painted tombs for the *Monumenti Inediti* of the Institute of Archaeological Correspondence. It was he who first had the idea of making reproductions directly by tracings, before transferring them in the form of facsimiles for the Museo Gregoriano Etrusco (Vatican City), with a triple objective, already consciously assumed, of documentation, conservation and disclosure (unlike Alessandro Morani's work (see above), active between 1897 and 1910, the remarkable work done by Carlo Ruspi has never, to my knowledge, been the subject of a truly detailed study); his concern for accuracy has probably never been surpassed (53). Following in his footsteps, but almost a century later, from 1928 onward, Gatti worked to reproduce the paintings of the most remarkable and best preserved Etruscan tombs at his time, in the form of watercolors or tracings. He did this in order to produce 1:1 scale glossy facsimiles for reproduction or display in various archaeological museums. The technical aspects of his work, and the difficulties posed by its conservation, are mentioned in an appendix by I. Scalia based on several precise case studies (201–203).

Two prefaces, one in Italian (A. Pessina), the other in French (D. Briquel), emphasize that this work is fully part of a research project conducted jointly on both sides of the Alps: developed in 2008 at the *Galleria delle pitture etrusche in facsimile* in Florence, which was made widely available to researchers and the general public in a digital format thanks to an agreement reached in 2014 with the ICAR website (http://icar.huma-num.fr/web/fr/). Created in 2000 by N. Lubtchansky, who presents (together with A. Fenet) the database and the place now occupied by the Gatti archives

(197–99), the website today is an essential working tool for the study not only of Etruscan painted tombs, but also other categories of objects (e.g., the archaic reliefs from Chiusi, Caeretan hydria). The first part of the volume is composed of three closely interrelated contributions, which allow us to discern the stages of Gatti's work and to locate them fully within the context of his time.

N. Lubtchansky discusses (17–35) the antecedents for the facsimiles of Etruscan paintings from the first reproductions in the plates housed in Cassiano dal Pozzo's Museo Cartaceo, produced around the first half of the 17th century, and in those of the Museum Etruscum by Anton Francesco Gori, from the 18th century. The practice subsequently spread widely during the 19th century at the initiative of various artists or antiquarians, but it is Carlo Ruspi who played the central role in the programmatic realization of these reproductions. His facsimiles of Etruscan tomb paintings were presented in three major Etruscan exhibitions held between 1837 and 1838 in London, Munich, and the Vatican, the latter two having been realized in the permanent setting of the museum galleries.

(In this regard, it is regrettable that no attempt has been made at the institutional level to recreate these tombs, since it is no longer possible to enter them on account of conservation issues: whether simple tombs or even more complex tombs (such as the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing in Tarquinia), the space, the details of the decoration, and the relation between the figured scenes can only be perceived from inside the hypogeum. In this context, and despite the controversial personality of its creator, Omero Bordo (an assumed *tombarolo*), the *Etruscopolis* of Tarquinia presents the visitor with an interesting experience: one can visit no less than eight painted Tarquinian tombs, recreated in the grandiose setting of a limestone quarry. It is unfortunate that this achievement, in itself a positive one, has been abandoned to private initiative.)

Yet it is the Campanari brothers' exhibition in London, organized for purely commercial purposes, which is the most obvious innovation during this period—albeit scarcely imitated later (35, n. 110)—that was probably inspired by the cork models produced by the Real Fabbrica studios in Naples: eleven Etruscan tombs, six of which were painted, and entirely rebuilt to scale, accompanied by archaeological furnishings from various sources offered on sale. The analysis of large enterprises made later, between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the following century—at the

Museo Civico di Bologna, Museo Civico d'Orvieto, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, or Museum of Fine Arts in Boston—while testifying to Ruspi's influence, makes it possible to distinguish, through the work of their makers, differences that reflect both their individual abilities and the interests and standards of their sponsors.

In her contribution, S. Sarti (37–50) summarizes Gatti's career and the history of the Etruscan painting gallery in the Museo Archeologico di Firenze of which he is the creator, in close connection with the development of Etruscan and Italic studies in Italy, whose first international congress took place in 1928. In 1931, eleven rooms were inaugurated at the end of an impressive collection of documentation, initiated some twenty years earlier, in which the collection of furnishings conserved at the museum was presented, more or less directly, in relation to the reproductions of paintings. Although these replicas were considered by part of the public at the time to be deeply suggestive, the reception of his work in scientific circles was not unanimously positive. Some criticized various approximations, but also the use of colors *un po' vivi* for the taste of the times—a critique that echoes, *mutatis mutandis*, the debate raging at the end of the last century concerning the restoration of Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel.

L. Cuniglio addresses the historical context of the first facsimiles, which emerged quickly as the only solution to save traces of the original Etruscan paintings, for want of the originals whose inexorable degradation was already noted (51–8). Cuniglio presents the techniques for producing the facsimiles by Gatti—sometimes requiring up to twenty days of work, such as in the case of a tomb in Chiusi—and their transfer to canvas, as well as the realization of many watercolors intended for separate presentation at the museum. These works document both the architecture of the tomb and the colors of the paintings intended to serve as aids for the restorations, so that they represent today the most faithful documentation of the state of the paintings at his time (compared to the *scarso realismo* of the facsimiles).

The second part of the volume consists of a catalog of the different entries—no less than 325 copies—that are published in Italian or in French. It is generously illustrated, with up to twenty figures in watercolors or facsimiles for the same tomb: a figure which also corresponds only to a selection of the number in a still richer file of often-unpublished documents, and today fully available at the ICAR website: plans,

overviews, layers, reproductions of different walls. Written by L. Cuniglio and S. Sarti, with the collaboration of seven authors (P. Bruschetti, G. Della Fina, L. Haumesser, F. Paolucci, G. Paolucci, A. Tsingarinda and C. Weber-Lehmann), this part of the volume presents fifteen tombs (one of which, that of San Severo, is not painted but had produced a famous richly adorned sarcophagus). Each document, whether illustrated in the volume or not, is the subject of a brief record which specifies its position, dimensions, technique, and current location (e.g., *Disegni china [rossa/nera]*, or *china e acquerello*, or *china, acquerello e matita su carta*, *acquerello su carta*, *gessetto e tempera*, *gessetto e matita*, *lucidi [carboncino, matita, pastello]*, *fac-simile [tempera su tela]*. Given the bilingual nature of the volume, a glossary of technical terms could have been useful to the French-speaking reader in some cases). This is followed by a close analysis that recalls, in a more or less detailed manner, the period and the conditions of the discovery of the tomb, its structure and dating, and the various interventions carried out to reproduce the paintings, as well as the specific problems posed by the state of conservation of each of these tombs at different times.

The work of Gatti is then examined, with its qualities and defects (which are not all attributable to him, as evidenced by the censorship of the two small pornographic scenes of the Tomb of the Bulls (Tarquinia), which are attributed here to an intervention by the Soprintendente: 171), and his frequent use of the necessary external documentation in view of the condition of the tomb at the time of his intervention. Gatti's contribution lies, therefore, more in creating plans of the tombs, sometimes reopened expressly to enable him to render a more precise survey than those of his predecessors. In a few cases, he was the first to note details that had escaped others (e.g., in the Tomb of the Hunting and Fishing in Tarquinia), and his documentation offers today the only preserved testimony of a now entirely lost tomb (that of the Tomb of Tassinaia in Chiusi). No doubt it would have been useful to document further, and in any case more systematically, the present state of the illustrated tombs and the interventions carried out to achieve—or not—their safeguarding (this is detailed only in the case of the Tomb of the Hescanas at Porano: 134–35), so as to enable the reader to appreciate better the contribution that Gatti's reproductions made to their understanding. Moreover, rather than providing a continuous text for each tomb, the editors probably should have asked

the various authors to enter their contributions in a more restrictive and hierarchical framework (e.g., the discovery of the tomb and its characteristics; reproductions earlier than Gatti, organized chronologically; Gatti's intervention; posterity and current state), that would have facilitated access to information according to the interests of the different readers.

The order of presentation of the entries is rigorously alphabetical, by site (Chiusi, Orvieto, Tarquinia, Vulci) and, within these, by name of the tomb. While this choice is certainly convenient, it may disappoint those who would have liked to have found in this volume an illustration of the evolution of Etruscan painting as well, since the ancient examples run the full range: from the last quarter of the sixth century (the Tomb of Bulls or the Painted Vases in Tarquinia) until the second century B.C.E. (the Tomb of Tassinaia at Chiusi), encompassing the Classical and Hellenistic phases. The six tombs at Chiusi (dated to between 475 and the second century B.C.E.), the three tombs at Orvieto (which cover the entire second half of the fourth century B.C.E.), the four tombs at Tarquinia (dated between 530 and 330 B.C.E.), and the tomb at Vulci (from the last quarter of the fourth century B.C.E.) would indeed have provided a suggestive picture of changes in Etruscan taste in funerary painting, even if that picture was not exhaustive. Another possible suggestion, and perhaps more relevant given the purpose of the volume, would have been to present these tombs in the chronological order of their documentation by Gatti—that is, from the Tomb of the Monkey at Chiusi, reproduced in 1911 (103), and to the François Tomb at Vulci, reproduced in 1929 (194)—in order to identify a possible evolution in his survey techniques and in the quality of his work. The bibliography (211–20) has about 300 titles, a relatively low figure given all the themes and tombs treated (that of the François Tomb at Vulci would require almost as much!), but the link with the ICAR site, which aims to group all the literature in one place, makes any such accumulation pointless. Even so, an *index nominum* could have served to make the physical volume a more agile tool.

Augusto Guido Gatti was the last of the great creators of facsimiles of Etruscan tombs, and it remains difficult to evaluate precisely today the value of his work, insofar as he mixes with his reproductions, more or less faithfully, the details necessary for the realization of the museological project in which they are inscribed. Since he

systematically used the work of his predecessors, thus also acting as a form of restitution/restoration (176–77), Gatti's work cannot give a reliable idea of the condition of the tombs at the time of his interventions. At his death, photography—which was no longer in its infancy, indeed far from it, and which he himself had experimented and exploited (38–9, 53–4, 58)—was to take over in the documentation of these monuments (194) and thereby make it possible to secure the reproduction of Etruscan paintings more quickly and more precisely.

The case of the extraordinary Tomb of the Infernal Quadriga, discovered near Sarteano in 2003, and presented here in an appendix by A. Minetti (205–207), is emblematic in this respect: the museum of the site offers a complete, life-size reproduction of the left part of the tomb, whose paintings are presented in a way that is both suggestive and extremely faithful to the original. This presentation is due to a process of direct printing of photos on the coating of the wall of the room which makes it possible to study the paintings at leisure and in excellent conditions, rendering a visit to the hypogeum less necessary, and its conservation easier.

And today, it is the new photographic reproduction techniques that invite us to believe that a profound revival of scientific research is possible in this field, notably by revealing renowned lost decorations. This is illustrated by the case of the Tomb of the Blue Demons in Tarquinia, dated to the third quarter of the fifth century B.C.E. and discovered in 1985. In recent years, the work of G. Adinolfi, M. Cataldi, and R. Carmagnola gradually revealed its extraordinary painted decor by employing a multispectral imaging analysis technique: it thus appears that the entrance wall of the tomb, on which only small traces of paint are now visible, was once decorated with a large hunting scene that presupposes close ties with large-scale contemporary Greek painting.

This volume is therefore an exemplary work of international collaboration, especially as it continues today with a research program called FAC-SIMILE, which seeks to encourage Italian, French, German, English, Danish, Swedish, and American researchers to think jointly about ways to exploit their documentary holdings (see http://www.efrome.it/la-recherche/programmes/programmes-scientifiques-2017-2021/fac-simile.html). Coherent in its presentation, despite the diversity of the authors of

the contributions and their potential interests, this volume should therefore prove of interest to a wide audience, well beyond a circle of specialists. But it is unfortunate that it also represents a kind of swan song of the Soprintendenza Archeologica della Toscana, created in 1907, whose responsibilities are now split, following a controversial reform, between four regional mixed superintendencies and one central museum (8). As a consequence, it remains unclear whether projects of this type will be able to flourish in the same way in the future given the new institutional framework.

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