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Sacred Serpent Symbols: The Bearded Snakes of Etruria

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Abstract
The symbolic attributes of snakes, which have appeared in art for thousands of years in all corners of the world, make them a popular icon. In Etruria, bearded snakes become symbols of fear, protection, and perhaps even the afterlife (due to the shedding of their skin), i.e., as the chthonic dwellers of the Underworld. They are usually held as funerary symbols by so-called demons or guardians as they traverse the Underworld with the newly deceased. The following review traces the depictions of the bearded snake in Etruscan art at the end of the Archaic period and looks at how it transitioned into an important funerary symbol lasting into the Hellenistic period.

The snakes of ancient Etruria,[1] known today as vipers or adders (*Vipera aspis* and *Vipera berus*)[2] still exist throughout this region, exemplified best by my own encounter with a viper upon entering the Tomb of the Five Chairs at ancient Caere (modern Cerveteri) as a graduate student. The viper slithered alongside the footstools carved below the five stone-carved chairs—it was a sight to behold (Fig. 1)! From that moment on I have wondered about serpents in ancient Etruria and, more importantly, their iconographic role in Etruscan art.

Seen in the earliest forms of art, snake imagery looms large in the artistic repertoire worldwide. Their highly symbolic form, venomous bite, and the ability to shed their skin make them icons of fertility, fear, and rebirth, to name



Figure 1: An Italian viper slithers alongside the stone-carved footstools in the Tomb of the Five Chairs at ancient Caere (modern Cerveteri). Photograph by the author.



Figure 2: A Corinthian aryballos with a scene of the Hydra, first quarter of 6th century BCE. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

just some of their many symbolic attributes. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the popularity of serpent iconography in Italy. The earliest surviving depictions of snakes in Etruria appear in the Italo-Geometric period. Their presence is primarily decorative and mythical, although larger messages regarding fertility, life, death, and magical properties must have played a role in their visual rhetoric. One such example is seen in a detail from a painted amphora dating to the early 7th century BCE now housed in the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam (inv. 10188). A female (perhaps a goddess?) confronts a three-headed serpent followed by two other serpents. Some scholars have described this figure as Medea, but it is rather unclear (as the Greek myth describes Medea confronting a dragon).[3]

By the 6th and 5th centuries BCE in Etruria, snakes held a special place in Etruscan iconography, where they appear in literally all mediums of art: vase painting, sculpture, architectural décor, metal arts, and wall painting.[4] They are often shown in scenes of myth, used as symbolic funerary decoration, or displayed for their chthonic, sacred, and apotropaic aspects. As subterranean dwellers, they were, by nature, associated with the mysteries of the afterlife. Generally speaking, they represented a variety of symbolic meanings connected to their form (fertility); poisonous venom (fear, danger), and ability to shed their skin (afterlife and chthonic traits). Since Etruscan literature has not survived, we are left with the delicate task of carefully examining material culture for answers. If an Etruscan body of literature had survived, perhaps we would know more about the meaningful role serpents held in Etruscan religion, funerary rituals and daily life. But there are a few Etruscan literary references to snakes in the *Brontoscopic Calendar*, an extraordinary document of Etruscan omens. It offers some insight on serpents by mentioning poisonous snakes and "creeping things" (probably snakes); certainly they were both feared and revered.[5]

The following study does not aim to cite every depiction of serpents in Etruscan art, for which a much lengthier study would be necessary. Instead I hope to highlight one feature about these snakes that deserves special attention, namely the presence of their beards. In fact, Etruscan bearded snakes appear to have had a significant funerary role when they were held in the hands of winged figures or so-called *demons* ("guardians" is a better term) of the Underworld. These particular snakes are frequently depicted as menacing; they often fix their gaze on an approaching figure with exposed tongues. Essentially, these images convey a certain level of trepidation—especially dramatic if we imagine how they must have appeared by the light of a torch on a dark tomb wall. What better way to ward off trespassers of the tomb (which doubtlessly must have been of concern to the Etruscans)?

One might assume that the bearded snake emerged in Etruscan art in the Orientalizing period via trade with the Phoenicians, Egyptians, or early Greeks. But in fact, bearded snakes became popular only during the Archaic period, precisely when Attic black-figure vases were being imported in high numbers to Etruria. Corinthian and Attic vases from the early 6th century BCE depicting the second labor of Herakles (Herakles and the Lernean Hydra) usually show the multi-snake-headed Hydra with beards. Indeed, the Lernean Hydra myth was an early and popular serpent theme in Greek art, as can be seen on a Corinthian *aryballos* in the J. Paul Getty Museum (inv. 92.AE.4) (Fig. 2). But other Greek subjects, such as the Gorgon Medusa,



Figure 3: Drawing of the Gorgon Medusa on the west pediment of the Artemis Temple at Corfu, ca. 590–580 BCE. After Gerhart Rodenwaldt, *Korkyra II. Die Bildwerke des Artemistempels in Korkyra* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1939).

also feature bearded snakes, either in the monster's coiffure (as in, for example, the Attic black-figure amphora with Gorgons in pursuit of Perseus in the Louvre [attributed to the Oll Group or Tyrrhenian Group, Louvre E857]), or as part of her belt. The latter appears on early Greek stone sculpture such as the well-known Gorgon Medusa on the west pediment from the Temple of Artemis at Corcyra (Corfu) dating to ca. 590–580 BCE.[6] In this relief bearded snakes are not only wrapped around her waist as a belt but also project from the Gorgon's neck (Fig. 3). Black-figure vases bearing representations of the goddess Athena often include bearded snakes that adorn her legendary aegis, while Attic red-figure vases feature scenes of the Maenads in a Bacchic frenzy frequently holding animals such as hares, felines, and the occasional bearded snake.[7] Finally, there are a few Attic black-figure works that depict the Chimera with a tail in the form of a bearded serpent (for example, an Attic black-figure cup by the Heidelberg Painter in the Louvre [A478] and an Attic black-figure cup in Kiel, Antikensammlung [B539]).

J. Boardman argued that the bearded snake entered Greece via Egypt, a concept that is not hard to fathom given the numerous images of bearded serpents permeating Egyptian art, especially in the funerary realm.[8] For the Egyptians, whose myths include some thirty snake gods, the serpent represented divine nature, they were guardians and protectors of the Underworld and were both worshiped and feared.[9] Snakes are often shown protecting gods, the soul, and the deceased's travel in the Underworld. Their beards are reminiscent of the false beards worn by pharaohs. Bearded serpents are connected with Osiris (also bearded), god of the afterlife and Underworld, brother and husband of Isis. Egyptian burials often contain the false beard placed inside the sarcophagus, a direct connection to the worship of Osiris.[10] The cobra was celebrated in the uraeus (a sacred snake symbol), worn on headdresses of deities and pharaohs.[11]

With respect to ancient Greece, it is possible to conclude that the bearded snake functioned predominately in the world of myth, representing "fantastic" beasts and/or hybrid monsters that are slain by a hero. There are, however, a handful of early funerary scenes with bearded snakes, for example, the 6th century BCE Chrysapha funerary relief where a bearded snake rises behind two seated figures. Guralnick argues for an Egyptian "connection" in the iconography—especially regarding the snake.[12] Another example is an Athenian black–figure kantharos (Cabinet de Medailles, Paris, 353). The vase depicts a funeral procession and pallbearers where a bearded snake appears to decorate a tombstone (?).[13]

Bearded snakes first appear in Etruria in the 6th century BCE and, not surprisingly, on works of art depicting Greek myths, especially Herakles and the Lernean Hydra. In fact, the Caeretan Hydria workshop at Caere not only celebrated the myths of Herakles but also produced one of the best-known works of this hero and the multi-snake-headed monster in all of pre-Roman Italy (Fig. 4). The artist, known today as the Eagle Painter and described by J. Hemelrijk as the "boss" and most prolific artisan of the workshop,[14] depicted the water snake with nine serpent heads, all of them bearded. Ancient sources describe the creature as having had multiple numbers of heads, ranging from one or nine to one hundred.[15] The Eagle Painter juxtaposed the colors of the nine serpents, alternating them in black and red, with the black serpents

featuring red beards and the red serpents, black beards. The contrasting shades of black and red speak to the amazing draftsmanship of the Eagle Painter, especially his appreciation for color and detail. The main body of the serpent wraps in a thick coil with black skin decorated in red dots (perhaps indicating poison), ending in a bifurcated tail. The special effects work to balance the symmetry of the composition while creating a colorful hybrid monster. Herakles, seen on the right side of the Hydra, grabs one of the serpent heads in his hand while six other snake heads fix their gaze on him—the serpent he grabs is the only one shown with its mouth open and tongue sticking out. Iolaos, Herakles' nephew, appears on the left side of the Hydra. He too grabs a serpent head and raises a sickle to its neck.[16] Note the small fire under Iolaos, an essential part of successfully cauterizing the decapitated serpent heads so they would not grow back. One humorous element of the scene is the crab (known in Greek mythology as Karkinos) coming to the aid of the Hydra by pinching Herakles' right heel![17] Herakles goes on to defeat the Hydra and crush the crab.

Interestingly, this same artist, gifted with a great sense of Etruscan humor, illustrated another Greek myth with Herakles that includes Kerberos and Eurystheus. Like the Hydra, the hybrid dog is in fact, by birth, reptilian, as he is the mythic son of Typhon and Echnida (part female and part snake). Kerberos occupies the main scene with Herakles and Eurystheus flanking it on the sides. The Eagle Painter's love for color is once again seen in his depiction of the three-headed dog in red, white, and black (black employed for the color of the front paws and the single torso). One of the most remarkable characteristics of this image is the snakes that spring forth from the creature's front paws, snouts, and the white dog's head and partial spine. These particular snakes are not bearded—they are in fact, spotted (a reference to poison?)—but their presence attests to the striking imagination revealed by this painter; in fact there are no parallels in Etruscan or Greek art.[18] Spotted snakes appear to be a specialty of the Eagle Painter, seen on another hydria in Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum 3577) depicting a maenad carrying a spotted bearded serpent.[19]

A bold example of a wonderfully symmetrical composition with bearded snakes can also be seen on a black-figure amphora from the Ivy Leaf Group, now in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden.[20] Two large eyes are augmented by sinuous snakes that interlock between the eyes and face each other with open mouths, protruding tongues, exposed teeth (not fangs), and dangling beards. Obviously the overall visual message is strongly apotropaic, with the eyes and bearded serpents working to ward off evil. It could have been used in the domestic sphere but most likely was made as a funerary object.

Architectural terracotta décor also supplies noteworthy bearded snake images—in this case, again associated with Herakles.[21] Six bearded snake heads, originally mounted on coiled bodies and placed on a ledge along a raking sima, are housed in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen. A torso with a lion's skin makes up part of the narrative with the bearded snakes. J. Christiansen and N. A. Winter suggest this terracotta narrative is most likely



Figure 4: Caeretan Hydria with Herakles and the Hydra, attributed to the Eagle Painter, ca. 530 BCE. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (inv. 83.AE.346).



Figure 5: Detail of a blue "demon" on the right side of the Tomb of the Blue Demons, Tarquinia, ca. 400 BCE. Photograph by the author; photo permission by Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo—Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per l'Area Metropolitana di Roma, la provincia di Viterbo e l'Etruria Meridionale.

a scene of Herakles and the Hydra.[22] Although the fragments, which date to the end of the 6th century BCE, are without provenience, it is probable that they came from Caere.[23] It is interesting to note that these bearded terracotta snakes were not employed in a funerary context, but rather on a civic or religious building.

Etruscan bearded snakes take on a whole new symbolic value beyond the boundaries of imported Greek myth by the end of the 5th century BCE, appearing in greater numbers almost exclusively within a funerary context. One explanation for this, I argue, is the symbolic funerary meaning the bearded snake acquires at this time as Underworld guardians and protectors who could instill fear when needed, maintain boundaries, and propel the chthonic properties of the Underworld. In fact, they appear in the funerary repertoire together with the "guardians" who brandish them.

The Tomb of the Blue Demons in Tarquinia, painted around 400 BCE, provides evidence of all of these new facets of the bearded snake. The entire right side of the tomb offers a landscape of the Etruscan Underworld where various "demons" or "guardians" figure alongside a family group, who most likely receive the newly deceased into the Underworld. If we focus on the right side of the right wall, we see a blue skinned "demon" (from which the tomb takes its name) who brandishes two bearded snakes in his hands (Fig. 5). A black-skinned winged "demon" with blood-shot eyes and fangs approaches as he traverses a large boulder in the Underworld (Fig. 6). Notably, the blue-skinned guardian displays the bearded snakes as frightening weapons: he holds them upright so as to threaten the approaching trespasser (essentially stopping the intruder from disrupting the journey of the newly deceased into the Underworld). In this scene, the snakes have multifaceted connotations, including danger (since they threaten the black-skinned demon); as protective devices, they are literally held in the hands of the blue figure and help him ward off an enemy and thereby protect a given boundary (most likely the entrance or liminal boundary of the Underworld).[24] Because these images are located in a funerary context, both the Underworld landscape and the



Figure 6: Detail of two Underworld figures on the right wall of the Tomb of the Blue Demons, Tarquinia, ca. 400 BCE. Photograph by Marvin Morris, photo permission by Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo—Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per l'Area Metropolitana di Roma, la provincia di Viterbo e l'Etruria Meridionale.



Figure 7: Detail of the Orcus Tomb II, back right wall with Tuchulcha and Theseus in the Underworld, Tarquinia. Ca. 325 BCE. Photograph by the author; photo permission by Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo—Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per l'Area Metropolitana di Roma, la provincia di Viterbo e l'Etruria Meridionale.



Figure 8: Bronze statuette of Vanth featuring two bearded snakes coiling around her arms, ca. 425–400 BCE. Photo permission, The Trustees of the British Museum.

underground chamber combine to highlight the chthonic aspects of the snakes. The snakes undoubtedly function within Etruscan concepts of the Underworld and not Greek myth.

The persistence of these ideas can be seen in Tarquinian tomb paintings, including the Orcus Tomb II, which merges Etruscan concepts with Greek mythical figures. On its back wall, Theseus and Pirithous (?) play a board game in the Underworld in the presence of the looming figure of Tuchulcha, who threatens the two men (Fig. 7). The inscription above Tuchulcha's head, which provides his name, is purely Etruscan. The features of this "demon" are somewhat horrifying: they include a large hooked nose, donkey ears, and snakes that sprout from his head. His blue-spotted wings have even been described as "snake-like" by K. Hostetler, who points out that they match the pattern on the snakes that Tuchulcha brandishes (giving the wings an overall reptilian appearance).[25] Clearly, his presence here functions to remind Theseus that he does not belong in the Underworld.[26] Below Theseus on the right, a large bearded serpent, not blue like the one held by Tuchulcha but white with brown stripes, rises from the ground as it wraps along the next wall and lifts its head toward a blue-skinned figure (unfortunately, most of the wall is damaged). The different colors chosen to represent these two snakes merit further study, as the colors may determine their specific functions in the Underworld (one being held, the other rising up from the ground).

Bronze also offers some fascinating examples of bearded snakes. For example, metal attachments for wooden funerary carts, as seen by the fragments in the Metropolitan Museum of New York recently studied by R. D. De Puma.[27] S-shaped reinforcement plates are decorated with bearded snakes, and a larger element shows two serpentine coils highlighting bearded snakes facing in opposite directions. Since the cart was probably found in a tomb from Populonia,[28] it adds to our understanding that such bearded serpents provide not only in the tomb environment but also, and more importantly, during the public funerary transport or "parade" from the home to the tomb, as the deceased was laid out on the transport cart. Additionally, an elegant bronze statuette of Vanth, now housed in the British Museum (inv. 1772,0302.15), depicts her clutching two bearded snakes that wrap around her arms (Fig. 8). She is shown walking forward and carries the snakes as if they are torches (one of her most common attributes). The visual narrative is clear and concise: the bearded serpents scare and ward off unwanted creatures, protecting her as she traverses the dark and rocky terrain of the Underworld.

Etruscan painted vases are no exception when it comes to images of bearded serpents. One of the most well-known Etruscan red-figure vases from the 4th century BCE shows the Greek myth of Alcestis and Admetus, but in a fully "etruscanized" manner (Fig. 9). On this krater, now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the lovely couple (identified by their Etruscan names, *Alcsti* and *Amite*) embraces one last time before Alcestis departs for the Underworld (having agreed to die in place of her husband).[29] The actual embrace itself is very Etruscan, as we do not see such contact in Greek representations of this myth.[30] But the flanking underworld figures on the left and right are what give this scene an even deeper local meaning. On the left we see Charu, an Etruscan guardian



Figure 9: Drawing of a detail from an Etruscan volute-krater with Alcestis and Admetus, ca. 350 BCE from the Bibliotheque Nazionale, Paris. After George Dennis, *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, 3rd edition (London: John Murray, 1883), vol. 2, frontispiece.



Figure 10: Etruscan stone sarcophagus with a lid carved as a roof of temple or house with two coiled snakes atop, ca. 325 BCE, from Grotta Dipinta, Bomarzo. Photo permission, The Trustees of the British Museum.

of the Underworld. He is dressed in a white chiton and winged boots and carries his best-known attribute, a mallet. The figure on the right, a Tuchulcha-like creature, clutches two snakes, at least one of which displays a beard. Using them as weapons, he thrusts the snakes toward the couple. The snakes are not only his attribute; they also assist him as he "exerts power over those who dare break the cosmic order of the Underworld,"[31] as Admetus should be going off to die, not his wife.

Stone sarcophagi offer similarly fascinating comparisons. There is a unique depiction of snakes decorating the lid of a large stone sarcophagus in the British Museum (inv. 1838,0608.12) (Fig. 10). The interlacing snakes surely evoke the afterlife and concepts of rebirth. It is difficult to distinguish beards, as the snakes are knotted with their heads lying on the "roof" of the sarcophagus, but they deserve mention all the same for their distinctive display. It is interesting to note that the sarcophagus itself is decorated with floral designs and winged underworld figures to the right and left on both sides: namely Charu with a mallet and snake, and two winged females (perhaps Vanth). Likewise, a Tarquinian sarcophagus, now housed in the Archaeological Museum of Florence, shows a reclining couple flanked by hybrid creatures. The one on the right has a serpent body with wings and a beard; they appear to be "magical" hybrids of the Underworld.[32]

I opened this brief analysis with tomb painting and here return once again to the painted tomb walls of Etruria in order to highlight one last example of bearded snakes in the Underworld. The Tomb of the Infernal Quadriga in Sarteano (found in the fall of 2003 and dating to the early 4th century BCE) presents a striking contrast to the bearded snakes held in the hands of underworld guardians both for its scale and its compositional style, which is unquestionably exceptional.[33] The back left tomb wall presents a large colorful hybrid serpent (over one meter in size), which appears very much like a mythical Hydra with multiple heads—three to be exact, and all of them bearded (Fig. 11). The serpents showcase bright red combs and two expose their teeth (not fangs) as they glare towards the tomb entrance. Without a doubt, the image is impressive for its foreboding configuration and style. The



Figure 11: Detail of the Tomb of the Infernal Quadriga, Sarteano. A three-headed bearded serpent glares towards the entrance of the tomb. Photograph by the author; photo permission by Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo—Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per l'Area Metropolitana di Roma, la provincia di Viterbo e l'Etruria Meridionale.

serpents lunge forward as their necks rear back and their figures combine into one large python-like body that coils on the ground, ending with a single tail whipping up in the air. The colors and patterns on this hybrid creature closely resemble those of the vipers (adders) of ancient Italy, with light-colored undersides and grey, dark-spotted skin. Surely this multi-headed serpent functioned to protect the deceased in the afterlife and served, as well, to scare off intruders to the tomb. Because it was compositionally too large to be held in the hands of an underworld guardian or "demon," it literally "loomed large" and functioned alone.[34]

Even non-bearded serpents or hybrid serpent-like creatures are not uncommon in Etruscan funerary art but are beyond the scope of this present study. Nevertheless, if we just look at wall paintings at Tarquinia we see such creatures in the tombs of the Typhon, Orcus I, and the Anina, not to mention the Tomb of the Reliefs at Cerveteri and the Hescanas Tomb outside Orvieto.[35] Assuredly, cinerary urns, painted vases, bronze mirrors and sculpture all feature some sort of serpents (even bearded); a much lengthier examination of this topic will assuredly tell us more. As for the Romans, the bearded snake appears to have been passed down by the Etruscans, where it became a vital component of the household shrines in ancient Roman domestic space.[36] If we had more archaeological evidence of Etruscan homes, perhaps we may note that their function in Etruscan society spanned well beyond the grave.

What can be gleaned from this analysis of bearded snake imagery in Etruria? The fact that real serpents do not have beards, makes these hybrid serpents special—the beard is a marker, most likely indicating special underworld powers. The Etruscan bearded snake, used at first in the context of Greek myths, quickly transitioned into a purely Etruscan motif in the funerary environment. That transition to an Underworld icon raises interesting questions about the Egyptian bearded snakes and their similar role in the afterlife and Underworld. But the handling of the bearded serpent in the Etruscan Underworld by figures such as Vanth, Charu, and Tuchulcha indicates a unique and very Etruscan use of these snakes. They had a specific role as aids to the escorts or "guardians" of the newly deceased as they traversed the Underworld. They create a sense of fear and ward off undesirable trespassers while marking sacred boundaries. The very fact that they are brandished by underworld "guardians" attests to their sacred function as a protective entity—fending off intruders (in the tomb) or unwanted demons who pervade the Netherworld. In sum, bearded serpents were significant devices in Etruscan funerary iconography, guarding boundaries, instilling fear when necessary, and at the same time embodying (literally) the chthonic properties of the mysterious Underworld.

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2 Kristen Hostetler, "Serpent Iconography," *Etruscan Studies* 10 (2004–20007): 203–209.

3 Marina Martelli, *La Ceramica degli* Etruschi (Novara: Instituto Geografico de Agostino, 1987), no. 41. For the possible Medea attribution, see Martelli 1987, 265. N.

T. de Grummond notes as a comparison a female figure who is demonstrably not Medea confronting a three-headed dragon on a Thracian gilt-silver plaque; Nancy T. de Grummond, *Etruscan Myth, Sacred History and Legend* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Antropology, 2006), 4.

4 See Hostetler 2004–2007; Adrian P. Harrison, "Animals in the Etruscan Household," in Jean Macintosh Turfa (ed.), *The Etruscan World* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1086–1114.

5 For more on the snakes or "reptiles" in the *Brontoscopic Calendar*, see Jean Turfa Macintosh, *Divining the Etruscan World: The Brontoscopic Calendar and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 120–121, 138, 149–150, 200.

6 See Robin Osborne, *Archaic and Classical Greek Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 73, fig. 31; Nigel Spivey, *Greek Sculpture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 154, fig. 6.2.

7 I thank Dimitrios Paleothodoros for bringing the Maenads to my attention. For more on this topic, see Susanne Marow, *Die Mänade in der attischen Vasenmalerei des 6. und 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1998), pl. 10, 231 (28).

8 John Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 151. See Philippe Germond and Jacques Livet, *An Egyptian Bestiary: Animals in Life and Religion in the Land of the Pharaohs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 177ff for more on the serpent in Egyptian iconography.

9 For more on the snake in Egypt see, The *Amduat* (*The Book of the Dead*, an important funerary text of the New Kingdom). Serpents are ubiquitous in Egyptian art; they were both feared and believed to protect sacred spaces and boundaries. Egyptian serpent iconography loomed large in their funerary art where they were guardians of the Netherworld. See Germond and Livet 2001, 177–178. For an early image of the snake in a funerary context, see the funerary stela of King Djet (fourth king of the First Dynasty) in Germond and Livet 2001, fig. 242 and Cyril Aldred, *Egyptian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), fig. 11. Snakes in Egypt are often horned, winged, and bearded. The false beard was worn by royalty (as pharaohs wore false beards to connect with the gods).

10 Gay Robins, "Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt, c. 1480–1350 B.C.," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 36 (1999): 68.

11 Germond and Livet 2001, 177.

12 Eleanor Guralnick, "The Chrysapha Relief and Its Connections with Egyptian Art," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 60 (1974): 175–188.

13 See Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), fig. 15 p. 20; Donna Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), figs. 34–35.

14 Jaap M. Hemelrijk, *Caerean Hydriae* (Mainz: Verlag Phillip von Zabern, 1984), 67; also 41 (no. 23, referred to as the London Hydra, but now housed in the J. Paul Getty Museum).

15 Pausanius II, 37.4 refers to one head. Vergil describes the Hydra with one hundred heads, *Aen*. 7, 658. For more on the various numbers of heads, see Raffaella Bonaudo, *La Culla di Hermes: Iconografia e immaginario delle hydriai ceretane* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2004), 123, n. 120.

16 It is worth recalling that Iolaos assisted in many of the Labors of Herakles. In fact, Apollodoros states that this specific labor against the Hydra was not considered a real achievement by Eurystheus precisely because Herakles was aided by Iolaos. See Bonaudo 2004, 123ff.

17 Compare the 6th century BCE Attic black-figure white-ground lekythos attributed to the Diosphos Painter (Louvre CA596). For more on the crab Karkinos, see Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.2. In the Greek myth, Herakles crushes the crab and kills the Hydra, but Hera placed them both among the stars as the constellations Hydra and Cancer.

18 This is a unique rendering of Kerberos with the snakes on his paws, snout and spine—in fact, probably the earliest rendition of Kerberos with three heads in Etruria. It is worth comparing a 6th century BCE Lakonian kylix that depicts one of the earliest images in Greece of Kerberos with three heads, draped in snakes with a bearded snake tail, but the paws are undecorated. See Maria Pipili, *Laconian Iconography of the Sixth Century BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1987), 6, fig. 8, no. 12.

19 See Hemelrijk 1984, no. 5, 14–15; pls. 36–38; fig. 5. Hemelrijk notes this is the only image of a maenad holding a snake outside of Attic black-figure painting.

20 Martelli 1987, no. 119, 307.

21 I thank Nancy Winter for bringing my attention to these bearded snakes in Copenhagen.

22 See Jette Christiansen and Nancy A. Winter, *Catalogue Etruria I: Architectural Terracottas and Painted Wall Plaques, Pinakes*, c. 625–200 (Copenhagen, Ny Carsburg Glyptotek, 2010), 44–45.

23 Nancy Winter discussed these fragments in person with me and suggested they could be Caeretan. Of interest is the Caeretan Hydria workshop active at this same time at Caere and where Herakles was a popular subject, suggesting craft connectivity among terracotta craftsmen and those of the painted vases.

[24] For more on boundaries in the Etruscan Underworld, see Francesco Roncalli, "Laris Pulenas and Sisyphus: Mortals, Heroes and Demons in the Etruscan Underworld," *Etruscan Studies* 3 (1996): 45–64.

[25] Hostetler 2004–2007.

[26] See Francesca, R. Serra Ridgway, "Revisiting the Etruscan Underworld," *Accordia Research Papers* 10: (2004–2006): 127–141; Mario Del Chiaro and Lisa C. Pieraccini, "Greek in Subject Matter, Etruscan by Design: Alcestis and Admetus on an Etruscan Red-figure Krater," in Stine Schierup and Victoria Sabetai (eds), *The Regional Production of Red-figure Pottery: Greece, Magna Graecia and Etruria* (Aarus: Aarus University Press, 2014), 304–310.

[27] Richard, D. De Puma, *Etruscan Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 68-69, 4.26c–e.

[28] De Puma 2013, 69.

[29] John Beazley, *Etruscan Vase Painting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 133; Del Chiaro and Pieraccini 2014.

[30] For more on the embrace, see Del Chiaro and Pieraccini 2014.

[31] See Del Chiaro and Pieraccini 2014 for a full discussion of this vase. For more on Tuchulcha exerting his power in the Underworld, see Ridgway 2004–2006, 131.

[32] The snakes are certainly images that relate to death and the journey to the Underworld. For more on this sarcophagus, see Françoise-Hélène Massa-Pairault, "Religion étrusque et culture grecque Quelques problems," in Françoise Gaultier and Dominique Briquel (eds.) *Les étrusques: les plus religieux des hommes. État de la recherché sur la religion étrusque* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1997), figs. 10, 14.

[33] For a complete assessment of this tomb, see Alessandra Minetti, *La Tomba della quadriga infernale: Nella necropoli delle Pianacce di Sateano* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2006); for comments on the painting, see Stephan Steingräber, *Abundance of Life: Etruscan Tomb Painting* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 215–218.

[34] For more on the wall painting and its relation to the artistic trends of this region of Etruria, see Minetti 2006, 42–44.

[35] The Tomb Orcus I shows a winged "demon" holding a serpent. It is not clear, due to the damage of the fresco, if the snake is bearded or not. In the Anina Tomb, Charu holds a serpent in his hand (appears to be not bearded); in the Tomb of the Reliefs at Cerveteri, Scylla appears (with snake legs) on the back wall; in the Hescanas Tomb, a female underworld "guardian" holds a snake.

[36] Federica Giacobello, *Larari Pomeiani: Iconografia e culto dei Lari in ambito* domestico (Milan: LED, 2008).