

Ancient Fanfiction: Tomb of the Hanging Aryballos by Camille Blanco

I had grown accustomed to the overwhelming silence of the bedrock chamber where I lie. The only thing providing me comfort is my spear, lying across my chest in its rightful position. Many centuries have passed like this, my thoughts the only thing filling the emptiness surrounding me. I can clearly remember the beautiful patterns of the pottery placed on my side. The fact that I haven't heard the light smash of pottery means that the hanging *aryballos*, or perfume vase, hasn't yet fallen victim to the same horrible fate as the *kylixes* and *oinochoai*, drinking cups and wine vases.

Suddenly, a faint groan hits my ears. My breath constricted, hands coming to grasp tightly at the lance on my chest. *It couldn't be.* I glance out of the corner of my left eye, toward the other side of the small room, but there is nothing. What remains is a charred pile of a man's bones on a stone slab—the only testament to the breath that left his lips so long ago. *But who was this man?* you may ask. That's unfortunately a story for another time. Another groan coupled with the sound of two stones raking against each other fills the space. I grip the lance tighter. *No one else is supposed to be in here,* I think.

Suddenly, the chamber is illuminated by such a harsh light that I have to close my eyes. *Was this it?* I thought. *Had Vanth* (an Etruscan daemon, guide to the Underworld) *finally taken pity on my tortured soul and was taking me to see Eita* (Etruscan equivalent to the Greek Hades)? Surprised gasps fill the space and once my eyes adjust to the light, I can see the men invading my space. I will myself to jump off the stone and defend the chamber, but alas, my legs will not cooperate with my mind. Two men with light, bizarre chest coverings wander inside the room. Tears streamed down the tanned cheeks of the man on the left, as he looks around the chamber with an expression I can't quite recognize. Their drapes and jewelry are not as lavish as the ones my mother and father donned. Everything about these men and women is unfamiliar. They poke and prod at everything in the room, paying special attention to the spear across my chest. I want to grab it back, but other movements catch my eye coming from the same two men who had entered first. They point to me and then their upper arms. To me and to their faces. To me and then they run their fingers over their jaws. *A man? Why did they think I was a man?* I was clearly a faithful female warrior of the *Rasenna*, a member of the highest court of my Etruscan homeland. These people bring a large silver torch into the room, letting it shine the whole day, even when the heavens have turned dark.

Days pass again until another enters the space, white covering his body. He, along with the two men from the previous days, look at the stone where I lie. The man with the covering holds up a small box. He points at me, then at his upper arm, then shakes his head. The other two wrinkle their brows, giving him a confused stare. Instead of running his finger over his jaw, he gestures to the back of his head and his lower torso, hand mimicking the natural cascade of feminine hair and dress. I wanted to rush over and press my lips to his cheek.

After that eye-opening moment, my true story had been told. “Skeleton thought to be Etruscan prince is actually a princess,” reads a headline. “Oops! Etruscan Warrior Prince Really a Princess,” reads another. The foreign men brought these papers into the chamber, sharing them with me and my charred companion. Finally, I was at peace. When *Vanth* and *Charun* finally appear to me, I do not hesitate to take their hands and my lance, following them into the serenity of the hereafter.

Context:

Since most of the Etruscan historical record remains as funerary artifacts, archaeologists must study these artifacts to gain more information about Etruscan daily life and beliefs. In the surrounding areas of Greece and Rome, men would be buried with luxurious objects that told the tales of their lives’ triumphs. In the Etruscan world however, women and men had relatively similar statuses in society, so their funerary practices reflected this idea. Since traditional archaeological scholarship is told from the point of view of men, I wrote this story to highlight, from the point of view of the Etruscan Warrior Princess, what gender bias in archaeology looks like.

Resources:

Information about the Tomb of the Hanging Aryballos:

<https://www.livescience.com/40530-etruscan-warrior-prince-is-a-princess.html>
<http://judithweingarten.blogspot.com/2013/10/how-prince-became-princess.html>

Find out more about the Etruscan civilization here:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/ancient-mediterranean-ap/ap-ancient-etruria/a/the-etruscans-an-introduction>

Information about gender roles in the Etruscan world:

https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1076&context=etruscan_studies