

Public Abstract
Megan Lynne Thomsen
M.A.
Art History and Archaeology
Herakles Iconography on Tyrrhenian Amphorae
Advisor: Dr. Susan Langdon
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The Etruscans were well-known in the ancient world for their seafaring and trade, not just with Greece but with other civilizations in the Mediterranean and surrounding continents. Oriental influence made its way into Etruscan arts and mythology, as well as into the Greek products that would end up in Etruria. The trade market with Greece began at least as early as the 7th century B.C. when Corinthian style pottery was at its prime, but by around 590 B.C., the Corinthian style that had been so popular in Etruria was losing its appeal, so the Athenians brought new innovative ideas to *their* pottery in order to keep the interest of the Etruscan import market. The result of this overhaul was the so-called Tyrrhenian amphorae. These amphorae, designated thus by the Greek word for the Etruscans and the location of their discovery, were made in Athens combining the popular styles of the day, and aimed at an Etruscan market already accustomed to the wares of Greece.

While this strong trade market provided an economic reason both for the production (by the Athenians) and the importation (by the Etruscans) of this specialized class of vessel, it may have been the popularity and appeal of the heroes, especially Herakles or Hercle as he was known to the Etruscans, on the vases that kept them in demand. Herakles was seen by both the Greeks and Etruscans as the ultimate hero who fought dangerous, wild creatures and won everlasting glory. The Etruscans may have been especially fascinated by Herakles not only because of his demi-god status and his great deeds, but because of his ability to “bridge” the human world and the divine through his conquering of death by visiting and returning from the Underworld, as well as his ascent to Mt. Olympos at his “death” to live with the immortal gods. Religion and the afterlife were very important to the Etruscans, and as Tyrrhenian amphorae were placed in tombs, it would appear that the scenes on these vases, many of heroic deeds and famous battles between good and evil, elicited a connection with Etruscan conceptions of funerary iconography/death and the afterlife.

The Athenians, who were aware of Etruscan traditions through their extensive trade interactions, combined the traditional bands of oriental animals from Corinthian pottery with the emerging Attic style of main figural/mythological panels to corner the market in Etruria. This created a new and sought-after product which allowed the Greek artists to expand their repertoire and illustrate scenes not commonly used or accepted in Athens. While these Tyrrhenian amphorae are not considered an important step in the evolution of Athenian vase-painting, this Attic response to Etruscan ideals led to significant response and change in the evolution of vase-painting in Etruria, and in the meantime gave the Etruscans a hero for their afterlife.