

HERAKLES ICONOGRAPHY ON TYRRHENIAN AMPHORAE

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ABSTRACT

The Etruscans, well-known in the ancient world for seafaring and trade, held deep beliefs about death and the afterlife, and often placed foreign objects in their tombs which fit with these traditions. 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 on vases called Tyrrhenian amphorae to corner the market in Etruria. Myths of Herakles (Etruscan Hercle) were the most common theme and the battles of this demi-god hero against evil foes may have elicited a connection with Etruscan conceptions of funerary iconography/death and the afterlife. As Herakles went to the Underworld and returned, essentially defeating death, he became a symbol of hope for the afterlife. These myths, along with “everyday life” panels and oriental animals, served to complete the funerary composition which made Tyrrhenian amphorae so popular in Etruria.