

*Eka Kobakhidze (Tbilisi)*

## THE GREEK- ETRUSCAN RELATIONS IN THE SPHERE OF MYTHOLOGY

During the last decades the research of the old universe civilizations was carried out with special intensity, thank to important discoveries, which were made in the spheres of archeology, linguistics, art history and culture.

These discoveries touched so to speak the already "discovered", traditionally studied phenomena as the Greek culture, also insufficiently investigated heritage, partly represented by mysteries and instated facts, such as the Etruscan civilization.

It is important, that by help of these discoveries many things have been changed, not only in culture research, but also in the matter of studding the relations between these cultures.

As it is known, during the centuries, normative, the only right direction of developing the antique universe of the so called "harmonious road" was a cultural model proposed by Greeks. Any "deviation" from the existing norm was explained by low level and under development of the culture.

Because of this reason, the Etruscan culture which was developing in the central part of the Apennine peninsula or territorially in the area of spreading antique culture, during centuries was considered to be Greek-Roman provincial version, anomalous variety, deformed sample of classical Greek culture principles.

At the end of 19th century and mainly, in 20th century art was surrounded by the spirit of experimentation and many modern directions have shown, that the so called Greek model may have many alternatives. The other base of interpretation of the so called "Etruscan anomalies" was created. Thus, science made such a conclusion, that Etruscans despite of their organic communication with antique universe, have created original and distinctive culture, which was different from Greek with its principles.

It may be said clearly, none of the spheres of Etruscan and Greek cultures gives us such an exhaustive information about relations between these two civilizations as mythology.

First of all, this is due to peculiarities of the Etruscan heritage research - as it is known, Etruscan civilization has reached to this day mainly by help of religious - cult content inscriptions, by burial painting and cult things. As it is known, none of the aspects of the old peoples spiritual life restored such a full picture about creation of its culture, as religion and mythology.

Research of Greek-Etruscan relations is important by Etruscan point of view - for studying Etruscan mythology is important for its relation with the other religious systems.

It is necessary to establish, how important is the so called "antique" - Greek system's role in formulating Etruscan religious world-outlook - is it an element of fundamental importance for Etruscan religion or we may perceive it as "borrowed".

It must be noted from the beginning, that in Etruscan religious notions, as we have it in the case of Greek, religious and mythological aspects are united tightly.

If in the case of Greek traditions, with the help of big scope of material, we are managing to distinguish ritual, religion and myth, as concerns Etruscan tradition, unfortunately, here this or that cult is not always clear for us, we must perceive the name in this or that context religiously or mythologically.

According to the material, which we own today, Etruscan mythological notions may be divided by several important spheres:

1. Cosmogonical and astral performances;
2. A human being and a soul of the human being;
3. Death and the other world;
4. Etruscan pantheon;

### 5. Prediction;

Volume of our report doesn't give us a chance to discuss in detail a role of the Greek mythological thinking in each of this spheres. We'll stop on several important aspects.

It must be noted from the beginning, that in Etruscan cosmogonical and astral notions Greek mythological concept about universe is not represented. Instead of it we meet with one interesting case in Etruscan and Greek view about dividing life of a human being into periods.

By Etruscan view, life of a human being, as it is said in Roman sources,<sup>1</sup> was divided into 12 seven year periods (so called *Hebdomades*). First 10 seven year period was considered to be nice for living, but in last 2 seven year period a human being was losing mind-intellect and at the end of VII seven year period he lost the boundaries with cosmic order.

The tradition dividing the human being's life into seven year periods in Greek reality is known from Solon.<sup>2</sup> Solon says in one of the elegies:

"In first seven year period a boy is changing the line of grown teeth, if God permits him to live until II seven year period, the signs of rising youth will appear. In III seven year period the limbs grow and chin is covered by sprouting hair. The color of skin is changing. In IV seven year period everyone is filled with power, by which a man can achieve wisdom. In V seven year period it is high time for a man to think about marriage and to have children, in VI seven year period a human being's mind is mainly formulated and he doesn't wish to deal with unrealizable work, in VII seven year period mind and tongue are best, in VIII too - fourteen years in total. In IX seven year period he has power, but his tongue and wisdom are weakened for achieving great feats. If anyone goes through the tenth seven year period, he will have bypassed the untimely death.

Thus, Solon considers, that practically after finishing 10 seven year period, a human being's essence is reduced and for him the main criteria is the fact, that a man must live until he has ability to think.

In classical philology it is not found out yet who was in this case the source of Solon and how original is his outlook. Unfortunately, we do not know what function each seven year period plays in Etruscan tradition, but it is evident, that according to Etruscan scheme there has been talk about active life of a man.

It is difficult to suppose, that Etruscans adopted this concept from Solon. It is more permissible to think, that Etruscan tradition has influenced Solon, by help of Greek who lived in Italy, or else Solon studied these views during numerous voyages, but it is also probable, that there could have been the third source, which is unknown nowadays.<sup>3</sup>

Much more material about our question is given to us by sphere of Etruscan notions, which is connected to death and the other world, because the main part of our epigraphic and archaeological information about Etruscan culture is connected to the kingdom of dead.

Burial wall painting of Etruscans and plastic<sup>4</sup> represent the voyage of the dead to Hades and to the other world. In this world there are represented not only the characters, but also plots.

Here, we do not discuss in detail the death and the other world of Etruscan notions. We only draw your attention to such elements, which are connected to Greek mythology.

According to Etruscan belief, death will come to a human being with face of two demons - *Tuchulcha* and *Charun*. As we see, *Charun* shows us evident connection with Greek *Charon* - person, who transfers souls over underground river *Acheront*. For comparing *Charon* and *Charun*, by our opinion, it is important to pay attention to two aspects, linguistic and functional.

The term itself shows us obvious conversion to Greek *Charon*. According to the opinion spread among Etruscologists - the name of Etruscan divinity is of Greek origin. Concerning the functions of Etruscan *Charun*, we think, that resemblance of Greek *Charon* and Etruscan *Charun* is effected by fact, that both of them are connected to transferring souls into the other world. Concerning the other moments, we see, that there is a difference there. *Charun*, an underground terrible demon,<sup>5</sup> is often depicted with the beak of a bird and with bestial eyes. He has a hammer in his hands, by which he takes away the victim's life.<sup>6</sup> It must be said, that he often is depicted on the ceramics and wall painting,

<sup>1</sup> Censorinus, *De Die Natali Liber*, Bibliotheca Teubneriana, 1993, XIV 15; XI, 6;

<sup>2</sup> *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati*, Oxonii, 1972, ed. M. L. West.

<sup>3</sup> According to it see E. Kobakhidze, *Etruscan cult terminology (semantics, genesis), logos*, 1994. 24-26.

<sup>4</sup> Brendel, O.J., *Etruscan art.*, ed. E.H. Richardson, Harmondsworth, 1978; Philipp von Zabern, *Malerei der Etrusker*, 1987, Mainz am Rhein.

<sup>5</sup> De Ruit, F., *Charun, Démon étrusque de la mort*, Paris, 1934.

<sup>6</sup> *Tomba dell'Orco. One of the craters from Vulci* (from collection of the national library of Paris).

decorated by Greek mythological plots - for example in the national library of Paris on one of the protected craters from Vulci, Charun is shown next to Alcestis and Admetus, by which he alludes to approaching death.

Thus, distinguished from Greek Charon, Etruscan Charun was the main figure in the process of a human death.

In case, if we admit, that the name is borrowed from Greek, as it is seen, we must think, that it fitted some divinity of Etruscans and superseded its traditional name. Though, the Etruscan tradition preserved the appearance and attributes of Etruscan divinity.

It is interesting, that these signs of Etruscan divinity later on were connected to Greek Charon. Though, this happened on the historical territory of Etruscans, we consider this fact to be very interesting.

Here Vergilius "Eneida's" Charon is meant - Portitor has horrendus aquas et flumina sevāt (Aer, V, 299...) and Charon of Dante.

Caron dimonio, con occhi di bragia  
loro accennado, tutti li raccoglie,  
battè col remo qualunque s'adagia,<sup>7</sup>

the poetic image of which is much closer to Etruscan Charun, and especially, to Charon of Dante, who, with shiny eyes, strikes disobedient persons by spade (compare with the hammer of Charun). It is evident, that Toscan poets know folk mythology spread on the territory of Etruria and are often using it in their compositions.

It is noteworthy, that in modern Greek language the root χάρος, χάροντας means "death".

Thus, Etruscan Charun differs greatly from Greek Charon with its essence and despite of a common origin he wouldn't be considered as a character of Greek mythology.

Concerning the other underground divinities, who also reveal their connections to the characters of Greek mythology on the level of etymology of names, the situation is different. These are Aita and Phersepnei.

Aita and Phersepnei are adequate to Greek Hades and Persephone. This inseparable couple also is shown inseparably with Etruscans - the soul, which happens to be underground, is present at a feast, where we meet with the helmsman of the other world - Aita and his wife Phersepnei.<sup>8</sup>

Today, there is no doubt about the fact that these divinities were adopted by Etruscans from Greek. We must note, that, this, as it is seen, was done earlier - Aita and Phersepnei are sensitively "Etruscized". Aita wears a wolf mask on the frescos and he has a snake in his hands. Phersepnei has also snaky hair, which likens her with the other demons of death.

(About Hades and a snake we may say in addition, that in Greek mythology the attribute of Hades was a bident, which, it is possible, has resemblance to a forked tongue of a snake or hideous being).

About the place of Greek Hades and Persephone in Greek mythology and about their origin there is a great difference in opinions, which reveals itself in modern scientific literature.<sup>9</sup>

In case of Aita and Phersepnei, according to the material that has reached us, the existence of their cult in Etruria is not confirmed. Their names are not seen on a bronze liver model discovered in Piacenza either.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, despite of the fact, that in Etruscan reality "Etruscization" of Greek Hades and his wife Persephone was carried out, they didn't acquire a solid place in Etruscan pantheon, because a place of the main God of death was already "occupied" by such gods, as for example Kalu and Mantus, whom we won't discuss, because it challenges thematics of our report.

In plots expressing Greek mythology one more Etruscan divinity Vanth is often presented, who is predicting death. She is depicted as a winged, naked woman carrying a torch on sarcophagi, craters, mirrors and urns. Vanth is "a Dear character" in Etruscan art related to cycle of Troia legends. On one of the mirrors she is seen next to images of Akhle / Achilles, Eva / Ajax, Truile / Troilus and Ekhturi / Hector.<sup>11</sup> In another place she is a silent witness of single combat between Eteokles and Polyneices.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Dante, A., *La divina Commedia, Inferno, canto III (109-111)*, a cura di Daniele Mattalia, Milano, 1960.

<sup>8</sup> Tomba dell'Orco, CIE 5364f aita-phersepnei, IV (Tarquinia) Tomba Golini CIE, 5090 f eita-phersepnei; III, Orvieto.

<sup>9</sup> Burkert, W., *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen epoch*, Stuttgart, 1977, 302 - 306.

<sup>10</sup> Maggiani, A. *Qualche osservazione sul fegato di Piacenza*, SE vol 1, M LHLXXXII, serie III.

<sup>11</sup> Gerhard E., Körte G, *Etruskische Spiegel, I-V*, Berlin, 1984 - 1897, V; 110.

<sup>12</sup> Hasti Afunei 's sarcophagi from Chiusi. -34, 3; X CIV, 5; 2, XXVI, 6. Wall painting: Tomba Francois in Vulci

Despite the parallels, which are drawing Vanth nearer to Greek furies,<sup>13</sup> the etymology of the word must be noted, about which many points of view are expressed. For example, K. Klemen is connecting Vanth to Asia Minor Hittite divinity Vandus, which shows us some relation to Aphrodite,<sup>14</sup> others consider her to be personification of wind and are connecting her to Hittite hwant, Latin ventus and German Wind.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, it may be said clearly, that the term was established in Etruscan language universe (compare Amin-nth — Etruscan genius, M-unth-u-ch one of Lasa) and there are no parallels found in any mythologies known to us, the more so in Greek mythology.

Without studying Etruscan pantheon, of course, it is impossible to have a discussion about Etruscan mythological notions. It is not our aim to present a full review of this pantheon. We'll only stop your attention on those gods, who are connected to Greek mythology.

Leaning on these principles we offer you the following classification of Greek divinities in Etruscan universe:

1. Gods and heroes which have preserved their form and content on Etruscan basis;
2. Gods and heroes which are linguistically Greek, but Etruscan in content;
3. Gods and heroes Etruscan by the name and Greek by content;

In the first group we have united Greek Gods and heroes famous in the Etruscan world, which demonstrate complete semantic coincidence with their Greek prototypes and they are different from Hellenic mythological characters only by slightly "Etruscized" names: Achelae (Ἀχελῷος), Achrum (Ἀχέρων, οντος), Aplu (Ἀπόλλων), Aritimi (Ἄρτεμις), Atunis (Ἄδωνις), Castur (Κάστωρ), Pacha (Βάκχος), Phersepnei (Περσεφόνη), Purcius (Φόρκυς) and etc.

All these characters are mentioned only in the specimen of art, Etruscan religion does not consider it as the object of cultural service.

The second group unites Greek Gods, which have only Greek names and their semantics are completely Etruscan.

While discussing Etruscan mythology in terms of notions, we have discussed in details one of such divinities - Charun, which as we have mentioned above, can be connected with Greek χάρων only by name.

We would like also to draw your attention to another divinity from this group.

Hercle presenting local version of Greek Herakles is often mentioned in Etruscan work of art.

Heracles is known from Greek mythology and takes part in all the plots connected with Heracles - he fights with Nemean Hydra, Lion, Pitans and Akelous. As if everything should indicate that Heracles according to our classification can be involved in the first group if not for the following circumstances:

a) On the mirror found in Populania Etruscan Herakle is a grown-up bearded man, being breast-fed by Uni-Tinia's wife, Etruscan superior divinity, divinity of sky. The picture is accompanied by the text informing that Hercle is the son of Uni (unial clan).<sup>16</sup>

This plot is not known in Greek mythology. Though the plot connected with Heracles and Hera somehow confirms the version on Etruscan mirror. This myth can be found in Diodore Sicilian and Pausania, telling the following: Alcmene, frightened by Hera's jealousy, leaves the newly-born Heracles in a field beyond the walls of Thebes. Here, at Zeus's advice, Athene calls Hera for a stroll. Goddess of wisdom makes Hera pity the abandoned, crying and hungry child and asks her to feed the child. Hera feeds Heracles, but Heracles feeds on her breast so strongly, that Hera throws him away because of the pain. According to the myth, since Hera fed Heracles with her milk, he became immortal, but the split milk transformed into the Milky Way in the sky.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the resemblance, the difference between Etruscan and Greek plots is that, first of all, Etruscan Herkle is bearded and not an infant, as it is said in Greek myth. Besides, Heracles is not called Hera's child or adopted child in Greek myths.

<sup>13</sup> Pffiffig, A. J., *Religio Etrusca*, Graz, 1975; 330.

<sup>14</sup> Vacavo, O. W., *Vanth-Aphrodite, Ein Beitrag zur Klärung etruskischer Jenseitsvorstellungen*, Festschr. A. Grenier, Paris, 1931.

<sup>15</sup> Luschi, L., *Cacu, Fauno e venti*, S.E vol LVII, MCMLXXXI, Serie III. 1991, II, 122.

<sup>16</sup> Pallotino, M., *Testimonia Linguae Etrusca*, Firenze, 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliothecae*, IV;  
Pausania, *Descriptio Graeciae*, IX, 25.2.

b) Hercle in Etruscan mythology is a very important character. He is considered to be the founder of Etruscan generation;<sup>18</sup>

c) In Etruria Hercle was the object of cult service, because his name is verified on a liver model found in Piacenza (right, auspicious side N29 segment).<sup>19</sup>

"Next to" Hercle, on the liver model, sky divinities are disposed — Cath (sun divinity) and Letha (celestial God). It makes us suppose, that Hercle meant some celestial divinity in Etruscan pantheon.

Thus, in our opinion, Etruscan Hercle, despite borrowing his name from Greek Heracles (this fact can be explained in Etrurian Greek mythology by increasing popularity of the works of art), in reality must be some celestial God, who at the same time was son of Uni or other divinity or an adopted child.

In the third group, as we mentioned, we united those Greek divinities and heroes, who are meant behind Etruscan denominations as by resemblance in appearance as well as semantically. We mean in the last one, that these Etruscan divinities are often substituting Greek divinities in mythological plots "animated" in the work of art.

From these gods we select Sethlan, Laran and Turan.

Sethlan's attributes, like Hephestus - Vulkanus, are anvil, smiths tongs and fire, as those depicted on numerous Populonian coins.<sup>20</sup>

At first sight, there is a simple moulding of Etruscan names on Greek divinity functions, but besides this it is not clear, what prevented them from copying directly Hephestus's name as it was done in case of Apolon, Artemis, Hades and others. It is not very probable, that bringing of Hephestus's cult into Etruscan religion happened in another way or by borrowing of the names, it was transformed so much.

It must be noted, that in the Etruscan reality by the time of "importing" iconographical Hephestus, there already existed some God like to Greek divinity, whose functions over the time grew on to Hephestus.

Relying on iconographic data, one part of scientists considers Laran to be the God of war.<sup>21</sup> Laran looks like Ares not only by appearance. On Populonian mirrors, decorated by Greek mythological plots, he is always substituting Ares.<sup>22</sup> On one of the mirrors with Sethlans - Hephestus is making weapon for him; in one place he is present at a birth of Menrva - Minerva; in another place - he is depicted next to Elinei (Helen) and Larshantre (Alexander - Paris).<sup>23</sup>

Thus, Laran is substituting Ares functionally, but here it is also difficult to conclude how analogous were their functions. Concerning the term - it must be explained on Etruscan ground with root - lar and with suffix - an. Lar - root in the opinion of Pfiffig<sup>24</sup> means "powerful, intelligent, solid". (We consider it to be quite possible, that Laran is coming from Greek Ares, as it is for example Etruscan Larshantre < Greek Alexander).

It is noteworthy, that this root - lar is figuring in numerous Greek names, among them, in a famous Larissa. To day it's doubtless, that it is connected organically to Pelasgic universe (about discussion and root - lar relations with Georgian universe see Gordeziani R. Zur Frage der agaisch - Kartvelischen sprachparallelen, Wiss. stsch. der. Fr. Schiller Univ., Jena, 1968).

Additional information on Etruscan Laran is given to us by the above mentioned mirror from Populonia, where the expression of Laran is followed by inscription - Cels clan. Cel, in the opinion of some investigators, means "day, dawn, east".<sup>25</sup> This, unfortunately, is the only case, where Laran shows difference from Greek Ares. If, we do not pay attention to the etymology of the term, which we discussed.

Divinities united in this sub-group are like each-other, as the little "Etruscan" material is left on them and also, in our opinion, the principle of a term creation is a very important factor.

So the third divinity we can imagine in this sub-group is not an exception.

<sup>18</sup> Mythological dictionary 1990, chief editor E. M. Miletiski

<sup>19</sup> Maggiani, A. Qualche osservazione sul fegato di Piacenza, S.E. vol 1, MCMLXXXII, serie III.

<sup>20</sup> Fürtwängler, A. G. Die Antiken Gemmen, I-II, B., 1900.

<sup>21</sup> Banti, L. IL mondo degli etruschi, R, 1969, 245, Pfiffig, A.J., Religio etrusca, Graz, 1975, 309.

<sup>22</sup> Buonamici, G., Epigrafia Etrusca, Firenze, 1932, taf LV.

<sup>23</sup> Gerhard E. Körte G., Etruskische Spiegel, I-V, Berlin, 90, 284, 82.

<sup>24</sup> Die Etruskische Sprache, Graz, 1969, 123.

<sup>25</sup> Pfiffig, A.J. Religio Etrusca, Graz, 1969, 310.

There is an opinion among Etruscologists that Turan is the corresponding divinity to Aphrodite in Etruscan religion. This opinion is based on iconographical data - in ceramics and sculpture Turan is tightly connected to Atunis or mythological Adonis. Indispensable attributes of Turan are: dove and swan, She holds often in her hand branch or flower.<sup>26</sup>

Supporters of Etruscan religion and in general, supporters of Indo-European Etruscan culture identified Turan with divinities of love for these reasons and they presented Turan as functional and semantic copy of Greek Aphrodite.

To our mind, an opinion, which is widely distributed about Turan's origin considers a question simply. They do not take into account the more archaic representations of Turan, which are not connected with Greek mythology. Turan is a young woman decorated with wings.<sup>27</sup> She is with her winged sandals on and stands in a pose of cult, accompanied by two priests. Undoubtedly if there were no inscription it would be impossible to identify Turan which represented Greek-Roman Aphrodite-Venus.

Doro Levi in the book "Early Greek ceramics from Crete" represents several winged goddess (e.g. on milatos tray, on pitos from Fortezza (a.a.o.s. 128., Fig.2), which reveal clearly the resemblance with Turan.

In our opinion, Turan vegetative (branch, flower) and bestial (exactly "poultry") (swan, pigeon) according to attributes, we may connect to vital power of nature, blossoming.

We may tentatively claim, that Turan lived underground and from there he was "monitoring" fertility and in spring with revival of nature he gave love and restored everything.

We think so because of Turan's resemblance to Vanth and the fact, that Etruscan winged divinities live only the underground. Turan - as term, by shape is Etruscan. This is the word, received from combination of tur. - root and an - suffix (compare selvans, laran, sethlans), in the opinion of researchers,<sup>28</sup> it has the meaning of "giving, granting", but suffix an means "possession". It's interesting, that Herbig was the first one, who connected this word to earlier Greek *τύραννος*,<sup>29</sup> Pfiffig in the book "Religio etrusca" considers, that this connection exists by all means, but in a contrary meaning. Perhaps in earlier Greek king of mediterranean, who was embodying the great Goddess Paredross in cult occasions of productivity. When the great Goddess is called Turan, then Paredross is "Turan-na" - owner of Turan.

In final part of this supposition, Pfiffig consider, that the name of Etruscan God is primary and earlier Greek Tiranos - comes from him.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, Turan, as in form, as well as semantically is Etruscan and by its origin, it is connected to earlier Greek and earlier Italy archaic layers of culture.

In our opinion, from the beginning Turan had a symbolic importance of restoring vital forces of nature. The etymology of his name proves, that he, in the first stage of development, denoted "offering, granting" power, which could give a new energy to vegetative and bestial universe.

Afterwards, by influence of Greek Aphrodite (who, of course, has gone many stages of development) she was perceived to be the divinity of love and erotic passion on Etruscan ceramics, which, unlike the Etruscan mythology, was influencing elinization.

Thus, we can conclude the following about the Greek-Etruscan "mythological" relations:

1. "Entrance" of the Greek mythology in the Etruscan universe was fulfilled after structuring Etruscan mythology into a system.

2. Semantically, as well as linguistically Greek mythological elements are chronologically of later period and they remained on the level of borrowing names and plots, which influenced mainly Etruscan art, than mythology.

3. None of the gods of Greek pantheon in Etruria turned into an object of cult service - not a single case of worshipping Greek divinities and heroes or a single case of building temples or altars for them is proved. There is not found work of art or cult subject dedicated to them.

<sup>26</sup> Pallotino, M. Etruscologia, Milano, 1985

Pfiffig, A.J., Die Etruskische Sprache, Graz, 1969

<sup>27</sup> See bronze statue from Cartel Mariano to Perugia and the mirror from Preneste (Gerhard E., Körte G, Etruskische Spiegel, I-V, Berlin 1884-1897, ABB. II 4, Abb-115)

<sup>28</sup> Savelli, A, Nuovissime interpretazioni Etrusche, Bologna 1970.

<sup>29</sup> Pfiffig, A.J., Die Etruskische Sprache, Graz, 1969

Cristofani M., Introduzione allo studio dell 'Etrusco, Firenze, 1973, 262-263.

<sup>30</sup> Herbig G., Kleinasiatisch -etruskische Namengleichungen. Sitzb. Kgl. Bayer. Ak.D.W. phil-hist. Kl 1914, 28.