

## Introduction

The late sixth century was a crucial period in Etruscan history: it witnessed the first monumental sanctuaries, the beginnings of planned cities, and the radical reorganisation of cemeteries. More widely, it was a period of intense contact with other cultures, notably those of Greece, Phoenicia and Central Italy; and it marked a dramatic and irreversible transformation of the agricultural and political landscapes of Etruria. Such changes came at the end of several centuries of internal development within Etruria, the beginnings of which can be traced back at least to the early first millennium BC. This book aims to examine these changes in Etruscan material culture. It brings together different aspects of Etruscan archaeology within a single analytical framework. While doing so it develops a new approach to Etruscan material and an integrated perspective on a society that is usually separated by intra-disciplinary boundaries. As such, it aims to provide a coherent explanation for change in Etruscan society.

Changes in Etruscan material culture (artefacts, images and standing structures) are traditionally explained in two main ways. The first sees the changes as a logical progression from primitive to modern; the second describes how the cultural world of Etruria falls under the influence of the Greeks. According to most accounts of Etrusco-Greek interaction, as Ridgway has so accurately put it, 'it was the proper business (and privilege) of the barbarians to be Hellenised, e basta!' (Ridgway 2000: 181). The material culture of the Etruscans is perceived as a pale imitation of that of their culturally 'superior' Hellenic neighbours. By contrast, the proposition of this book is that the making and transformation of Etruscan culture constitute an active process on the part of the Etruscan producers and consumers of that culture. Explanations of the major, macro-scale, transformations have thus to be sought in the detail of Etruscan approaches to making material culture on the micro level. Such an examination reveals that roughly contemporary changes across a range of Etruscan artefact types are linked by a common concern with the articulation of difference through the manipulation of surface. An increasing emphasis on the actual surfaces of the body, the tomb, the city and so forth is explored in the individual chapters and is

concomitant with changing attitudes to the metaphorical distinctions these surfaces separate – such as the individual, the dead and the urban. These in turn were linked to changing attitudes towards cultural distinctions and differences.

In the following discussions of the material and social articulation of such differences, these concepts do not represent discrete or absolute states, and even less binary oppositions; rather, they are extreme points around which Etruscan culture negotiated its position in relation to these extremes. Over time, formal changes in Etruscan material culture were implicated in, and constituted, changing positions in relation to these categories.

The emphasis on surface in the following analysis stems from the nature of the changes in Etruscan material culture, and from a desire to explain these changes. Surface is a particularly helpful analytical tool for an archaeological study as it allows the close inspection of the formal characteristics of individual objects, while admitting broader cultural explanations for those characteristics. The concept is both object-specific and common to all objects, just as its use is important for Etruscan society and potentially others. Although the concept may be criticised for being a catch-all – all objects have surfaces – it remains grounded by paying attention to the particular characteristics of the individual surface under scrutiny. At the same time, its potential inclusivity provides a mechanism and focus for studying change between object types, over time and across space, as meaningful parallels can be traced across these distinctions. The differing treatment of the surfaces of people, objects and spaces over time and between regions has a bearing on their perception and definition. The dramatic changes that characterised the later sixth century in Etruria are both a symptom and a cause of the increased attention to surface at this time.

Of course, the analysis of surface is not the only key to understanding Etruscan material culture change – the importance of social, political, and economic factors has been amply demonstrated in recent studies. However, though these explanations operate convincingly within object types, the overarching quality of the concept of surface allows examination of change on a much broader level. Furthermore, though there are potentially other such concepts that could help our understanding of Etruscan archaeology, such as volume, scale, temperature, quality of light, movement, etc., the importance of visibility associated with the creation and manipulation of surface makes the concept more appropriate to the study of a period of political, social and ontological reordering. Without pre-empting later discussion, the important factors here are that viewing is a way of placing, or ordering the object being viewed, and that viewing is an activity that can

be undertaken without active participation in the cultural, religious and social activities that are being viewed.

In its investigation of surface and (material) culture change, this book takes five types of object: respectively, mirrors, tombs, sanctuaries, houses and cities, and traces changing treatments of surface within them. The structure of the book reflects the nesting categories of social life that these objects represent – moving out from the individual to the wider urban community, and finally to the rural landscape, and by extension, beyond into the Mediterranean world. In doing so, it leaves aside potential parallel discussions that operate at these levels – for example, mirrors are discussed, while toilette boxes are not. This is not to suggest that the latter are not suitable for such analysis, but rather that they would not contribute significantly more to the discussion of the creation of individual identities than the discussion of mirrors. Thus, although it is an essential principle of this book that material culture is all-embracing, and that the concept of surface is equally instructive across that range, there are many categories of material culture that are not included here. Mirrors in particular were chosen as a starting point because of their explicit link (due to their function) with the creation of personal identity through the manipulation of the surface of the body. Other artefacts (such as ceramics, ceramic decoration, votive bronze sculpture and even funerary sculpture, where the representations are directly linked to individual Etruscans) are not implicated in the same way (though a recent analysis has shown the potential of such a line of inquiry: Roth 2001–3). For the same reasons, componential analysis of domestic or funerary contexts (a significant lack in Etruscan studies) has not been carried out for this study.

While the approach of this book is open to the criticism that much is left out, it is also susceptible, in considering different artefact types together, to charges of being too inclusive. The importance of overarching comparisons has been stressed for some time, and the resulting generalisation has been exploited for its potential to reveal more than the individual case study (for instance, Finley 1977: 314; more recently Hölscher 2004: 2–5). Inevitable results of such an approach are a lack of detail or resolution, and the conjouring of exceptions that do not ‘fit’ the overall pattern; nonetheless, the new patterns that emerge from broad comparisons can provide alternative perspectives to long-studied material. Continuing to study single areas or artefact types would be to perpetuate the particularistic studies of individual objects that are already well represented in Etruscan studies.

A significant consideration of wide-ranging comparisons across material types is chronological robustness – how closely can we reasonably expect parallel developments in complementary areas of culture to correspond?

Problems with chronology that lie at the materially specific level of investigation are addressed in the chapters on individual material. More importantly, the different dating bands applied to different material pose problems of comparability: a mirror can be dated to within twenty-five years, a house to two centuries. This means that changes that are noted can be dated only with varying precision according to the type of material under study. In terms of a wider study of material change, this means that change can appear to take place at different times or at different rates in different types of object.

Of course, it may be the case that change did take place at different times, or not at all in some areas. However, in the case of the Etruscan material culture examined in this book, I do not believe this to be the case. Instead of trying to see change occurring at exactly the same time in all kinds of material, it is important to bear in mind two considerations. The first is that not all aspects of social life change at the same rate, and that not all kinds of material production are as versatile as each other: for instance, it is far easier to make a mirror in a new way than to rebuild the walls of a city in a new way – mirror production would thus respond more quickly than city-wall construction to any cultural changes that may affect them. Second, changes in cultural or social behaviour are cumulative and progressive, taking place over time, and in relation to previous changes. This has been acknowledged most notably in the work of Italian prehistorians and proto-historians who, in their examination of the emergence of urban identities in the peninsula, take a far longer perspective than that traditionally taken by Etruscologists, pushing the origins of urbanism back into the Bronze Age. (For a summary and bibliography see Vanzetti 2002.) Therefore the changes that culminate in the late sixth century have long tails stretching back into previous generations. The length of these tails varies both because of the nature of archaeological dating and because of the differential receptivity of different areas of social life to change. This means that change of the kind discussed in this book is unlikely to occur according to excessively neat chronological coincidence; rather the changes are more gradual and the interlinked spheres of social life will be influenced by changes across a range of material. Such a change is also unlikely to have a single moment of inception or origin. For the material in this book, I hope to show that such an approach to change has greater potential for integrating the gradual increase in contact with foreigners, as well as the local long-term developments in central Italy.

The attempt to make connections between parallel spheres of Etruscan cultural activity is validated by the Etruscans themselves, who provide striking evidence that they thought in an analogical manner, in other words across

categories. In the nineteenth century, in a field on the outskirts of what is now modern Piacenza, a farmer found an extraordinary bronze object while ploughing his fields: a solid-cast, life-size model of a sheep's liver (van der Meer 1987). Though stylised, it is nonetheless anatomically accurate. The surface of the liver has been divided up into different zones or regions, and each region contains the inscribed name of an Etruscan divinity. It is thought to be a teaching model for trainee augurs, or an *aide memoire* for more forgetful ones. As Rykwert was quick to point out, what is remarkable about the Piacenza liver is the evidence it provides of the deeply cosmological view that the Etruscans must have had of their built and natural environments: a view of their universe as a unified, ordered whole in which different spheres of human and natural life bore direct and coherent relationships to each other (Rykwert 1976). As a microcosm, the liver represents the division of the skies into regions, and the deities associated with each region. Thus, all natural phenomena observed within a particular sphere, for example the sphere of the sky, could be interpreted, through the microcosm of the liver, according to the will of the particular divinity associated with that region. The liver functioned as a refracting lens through which observed natural phenomena were viewed and interpreted.

The Piacenza liver, and similar surviving terracotta models, provide unique insight into the Etruscan conception of the world around them. Such evidence testifies to a culture with a particularly refined sense of the relationships between different ontological and spatial spheres. In the following analysis emphasis will be placed on the process by which ontological differences and categories were mapped on to the human material world. Whether we see this in terms of Tilley's 'metaphor', Shore's 'analogical schematisation', or Bourdieu's 'scheme transfers', it is important to acknowledge the central role of cognitive structures in the binding together of Etruscan culture. By focusing on changes in the treatment of surface in Etruscan material culture, this book will attempt to cast light on the cognitive structures according to which the Etruscan cultural environment was ordered. It will examine the process and impact of surface change in five main areas of Etruscan material culture.

Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical foundations upon which the following chapters are based. It is divided into four main sections. The first outlines the characteristics of previous approaches to the study of cultural change in Etruria. It identifies six major influences on the study of Etruscan culture and assesses them in the light of recent developments in other areas of archaeology. This section is not intended to reject all the findings of these approaches; it aims, rather, to draw attention to certain biases

and assumptions that have been implicit in some past studies of Etruscan material culture. The work of the following chapters is based to a very large extent on the conclusions of the work discussed in Chapter 1.

The second section outlines the theoretical position taken in the rest of the book. Drawing on a wide range of disciplines and archaeological sub-disciplines, it presents a theoretical approach that emphasises the importance of social and cultural knowledge in the making of material culture, and argues for the existence of a culturally informed framework within which material culture was created. This stresses the deliberate nature of all decisions that go into the making of objects and spaces, thereby accounting for their social resonance and justifying a detailed study of change in material culture form. The formal aspects of material culture take on a new significance when viewed as the physical manifestation of the cognitive and ideological processes that shaped their creation and determined their use. This is not, however, to mark a return to an outdated model of material determinism; rather, this approach seeks to restore to material culture its active role in shaping the world in which individuals live. In a study so intimately and inherently concerned with culture change and contact, this approach affords us a unique opportunity to study the hitherto unacknowledged role of the Etruscans in the making of their own culture.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the importance of boundaries and surface in negotiating physical, social, cultural and ontological difference. As the visibility of boundaries and surface is such an important part of the argument of this book, the section also considers the concept of the viewer in Etruscan culture and the extent to which visual concerns may have impacted on changes in the treatment of surface.

Chapter 2 has two aims: first, to emphasise the growing importance of personal identity in the late sixth century; second, to explore changes in one aspect of that identity, namely gender identity. Both these inquiries derive from an analysis of bronze hand mirrors from the late sixth century onwards, and take as their starting point the importance of mirrors in the process of bodily adornment. Men and women used the reflective surface of mirrors as part of a process of adornment that was designed to alter the surface appearance of their bodies. This manipulation of bodily surface through the process and practice of adornment is deeply rooted in a society's concepts of beauty and desirability. Put another way, a society's concepts of beauty are inscribed on the surface of the bodies of men and women through adornment. It goes without saying that we do not have the products of adornment, the beautified bodies of Etruscans, left to study. However, on the backs of the mirrors, Etruscan craftsmen engraved images depicting a

wide range of mythological and non-mythological scenes, and these images provide representations of the cultural and social norms and values in which the process of adornment was embedded. The chapter argues first that the sudden emergence and proliferation of this type of object in the late sixth century indicates a growing stress on the creation, through adornment, of an image of the body and self, and thus of personal identity. Second, it uses the scenes on the backs of the mirrors to explore the similarities and differences between male and female adornment in the creation of gender identity from the late sixth century onwards. It is argued that the deposition of mirrors in burial is a symptom of the wider cultural concern with surface, in this instance with the human body.

Tomb architecture forms the subject of Chapter 3. During the course of the sixth century, funerary monuments saw a radical decrease in scale. In place of the monumental, round burial mounds of the preceding century, smaller mounds were constructed, and by the end of the sixth century the decrease in scale was accompanied by a change in shape, resulting in rows of small, square, cube-tombs. Such changes in tomb architecture should be seen in relation to other changes in Etruscan material culture, and as part of a broader cultural transformation in Etruria. Surface functions as an important means of articulating and mediating distinctions. This chapter examines the changing treatment of the surface of Etruscan tombs and the role it plays as the interface between the living and the dead. Three specific areas of differentiation within the tomb will be considered: the treatment of the boundary between the inside and the outside of the tomb, the structure of the tomb itself, and the location and deployment of tomb decoration.

Chapter 4 examines the process of surface change through another form of ritual space: that of sanctuaries. More specifically, it examines the changing locations for communal ritual activity in Etruria from the Iron Age until the fifth century BC. During the early phases of Etruscan archaeology, cultic activity took place in locations in the landscape that were not marked architecturally. Although during the seventh and sixth centuries it is possible to argue for the ritual use of certain buildings and complexes, most notably at Roselle and Murlo, ritual is only one of many possible functions that have been attributed to these buildings. In fact, this ambiguity in the archaeological evidence suggests that such buildings had multiple uses and that ritual activity took place alongside other activities in the same physical space. This apparent heterogeneity of use changes dramatically in the sixth century. By the end of the sixth century there emerged the highly codified architecture of the Etruscan temple and sanctuary space; it was to remain in use, little changed, for at least two centuries. Chapter 4 takes two aspects of Etruscan

temple architecture in order to examine changes in surface form and the material marking of difference. The first is the appearance of temples in the archaeological record: it is argued that the development of a codified, formal architecture that is specifically identifiable as a temple reflects the need to remove the ambiguity of the former centuries. This is then emphasised by the creation of a sanctuary space around the temple, bounded by a wall, and containing other temples or associated sacred structures. In this way, the activity of ritual was given a visible boundary and surface, with its own distinct architectural identity separated from the other activities with which it had co-existed in the former buildings. The second aspect of the chapter is to examine in detail those elements of Etruscan temple architecture that make it stand out from what went before, from contemporary Greek temple forms and, most importantly, from other types of spaces and structures. It examines the location and deployment of temple decoration, the architectural details set within the Etruscan rural and urban landscape, and the formal composition of sanctuary structures.

Chapter 5, on domestic architecture, is the first of two chapters that deal with non-sacred space. The archaeology of Etruscan houses is traced from the Iron Age to the fifth century BC, in order to examine the changing treatment of domestic space. The divisions marked here are those between the public sphere, outside the domestic unit, and the private sphere housed within it. The formal elements of individual houses are implicated both in marking the difference, and in allowing passage, between these spheres. The elements examined in the chapter include the form of the house, the materials used in its construction, the use of open spaces within domestic complexes, and the treatment of entrances. In a similar way to earlier chapters, the changing treatment of the externally visible surface of domestic architecture is seen as part of a wider process of the negotiation and articulation of difference in late sixth-century Etruria.

The larger urban context for domestic architecture forms the subject of Chapter 6. Urban form will be examined from the hut settlements of the Iron Age to the masonry cities of the sixth and fifth centuries. The malleability of the built environment is central to this chapter, as is the conception of urban form as a distinct entity, or an object in itself. As such, mutations and transformations in different elements of urban form will be considered as indicative of changing attitudes towards the city itself. Just as Chapter 5 focused on the negotiation of public and private space, the examination of urban elements focuses on the difference between concepts of urban and rural, and on different kinds of urban space. In other words it will examine the definition of the city in relation to the individual inhabitant, and also to

the area outside the city. The material manifestation of changing attitudes to house form, street networks, craft or industrial production areas and city limits will form the main part of the chapter. Such surface change highlights an increasing awareness of the distinction between the urban sphere and the non-urban sphere.

The book concludes with an examination of the wider Mediterranean context in which the changes in Etruscan material culture took place. As already mentioned, these changes have often been ascribed to Hellenic agency. This concluding chapter examines the premises behind such 'colonialist' interpretations of cultural contact, and rejects them both on theoretical grounds and on the evidence of the Etruscan material culture. It then attempts to develop for the Etruscans a model of ancient Mediterranean interaction that more closely reflects the complexity and heterogeneity that characterise the conclusions of recent work on Greek activity in the central Mediterranean, much of it done in the light of post-colonial theory. The importance of surface in marking the boundaries of cultural identity is brought to the fore in considering the explanations for Etruscan material culture change within this more dynamic picture of Mediterranean and Italian interaction.

The increased emphasis on surface and the manipulation of surface in the different areas of material culture examined in this book is closely linked to wider cultural concerns about a need to articulate difference. It is the desire to express difference that is a key to our understanding of changing Etruscan attitudes to their identity within the Mediterranean world. Changes in attitudes to the surface of the body are analogically related to changes in tomb architecture, and both are related in a similar manner to a wider sense of cultural identity, or the difference between Etruscan and non-Etruscan.

# 1 | Models of change in Etruria

## Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical basis on which the analysis of the following chapters takes place. First it considers some of the approaches that have underpinned and characterised previous studies of Etruscan material culture change; next it draws on recent developments in the wider discipline of archaeology and beyond in order to establish a theoretical model for the following chapters.

## Models of change in Etruria

This section examines the characteristics of previous treatments of Etruscan material with particular emphasis on how change in material culture has been approached. Its aim is to open discussion about certain assumptions that have been implicit in previous treatments, and to highlight the limitations of such approaches for our understanding of Etruscan culture more widely. Though this section may often seem critical of these approaches, much of the work of the following chapters is based on their conclusions. The analyses in the rest of the book take for granted the chronological and cultural framework established by such work; they aim not to contradict them, but to push their conclusions further.

## Classical studies

One of the most important factors affecting the study of the Etruscans has been the closeness of the subject to the discipline of Classics. Both within and outside Italy, the study of the Etruscans has proceeded concurrently with the study of Greece and Rome and this has had a significant influence on the way in which Etruscan culture has been studied. It is not surprising therefore that many inquiries into the Etruscan past have begun with the consultation of Greek and Roman writers.