

# Deliciae Fictiles IV

Architectural Terracottas in Ancient Italy  
Images of Gods, Monsters and Heroes

Edited by  
Patricia Lulof  
Carlo Rescigno



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## Architectural Terracottas in Ancient Italy Images of Gods, Monsters and Heroes

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# THE WINGED HORSES ON THE ARA DELLA REGINA TEMPLE AT TARQUINIA

GIOVANNA BAGNASCO GIANNI\*

Just over seventy years since P. Romanelli's discovery of the Winged Horses terracotta plaque (fig. 1), this contribution summarizes a new hypothetical reconstruction of the subject represented on the pediment of the third phase of the temple in the Ara della Regina sanctuary at Tarquinia (Temple III), still visible today. The subject of the whole figurative program, certainly mythical, is reconsidered as is the position of the Winged Horses within the pediment. The Winged Horses Group was discovered in the summer of 1938 and displayed in the Museum of Tarquinia immediately after restoration, in the autumn of the same year. Even though well known to the wider public, it received little attention in discussions about the relationship between Greek and Etruscan art. This might have been due to the difficulty of placing the Group in the framework of criteria established for Etruscan art after the discovery of the Apollo of Veii in 1916<sup>1</sup>.

The Winged Horses terracotta plaque was found in more than a hundred fragments spread over the top surface of the terrace built in front of Temple III, thus confirming their attribution to this very phase<sup>2</sup>. The main feature of Temple III is the enlargement of

the earlier foundations and podium with a terrace, incorporating the earlier structures of Temple I and Temple II and bringing the pediment to a width of 25,50 m. The stratigraphical sequence suggests a date for Temple III within the first decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. This assessment comes from the chronology of the strata created during rebuilding activity, discovered below the front of the present foundations, partially destroying previous Archaic structures<sup>3</sup>.

On the whole, the chronology of this phase is consistent with that of the Winged Horses terracotta plaque reached through a formal, stylistic and iconographic analysis.

The terracotta group, oriented to left, stands on a small shelf below the horses' hooves; it has no borders at the sides, except for a low frame at the left. The right side shows that the pair of horses must have been yoked to a chariot, of which only the pole survives, placed on a second plaque that was positioned alongside the first one. The top of the plaque is obliquely cut, giving a 22° slope. The group is in low relief in the bottom part whereas it becomes sculpture in the round at the level of the horses' heads and wings, gradually detaching from the background (fig. 2)<sup>4</sup>.

According to the metrological analysis undertaken by A. Emilozzi, there are at least three possible reconstructions for the whole composition of the Winged Horses followed by their chariot, occupied by one or more figures: 1) w. 165 cm (with auriga standing alone); 2) w. 182 cm (with auriga and a second figure both standing in the chariot); 3) w. 214 cm (with auriga standing in the chariot and a second figure mounting it)<sup>5</sup>. Starting with the first possibility, we see that it already exceeds the width of the Pyrgi antepagmentum (137 cm), being 28 cm wider. As a result, its placement on the left mutulus is difficult to argue<sup>6</sup> since such a huge mutulus would have needed a corresponding antepagmentum covering a central column whose dimensions would have determined the width of the pediment base. This would greatly exceed the width of Temple II (25,50 m), which was incorporated into Temple III with minor changes.

For these reasons, it is possible that the terracotta plaque could belong to the left side of the upper



Fig. 1.\* The Winged Horses Group after restoration. Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale Tarquiniense (MNT) (Photo by Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici per l'Etruria Meridionale).



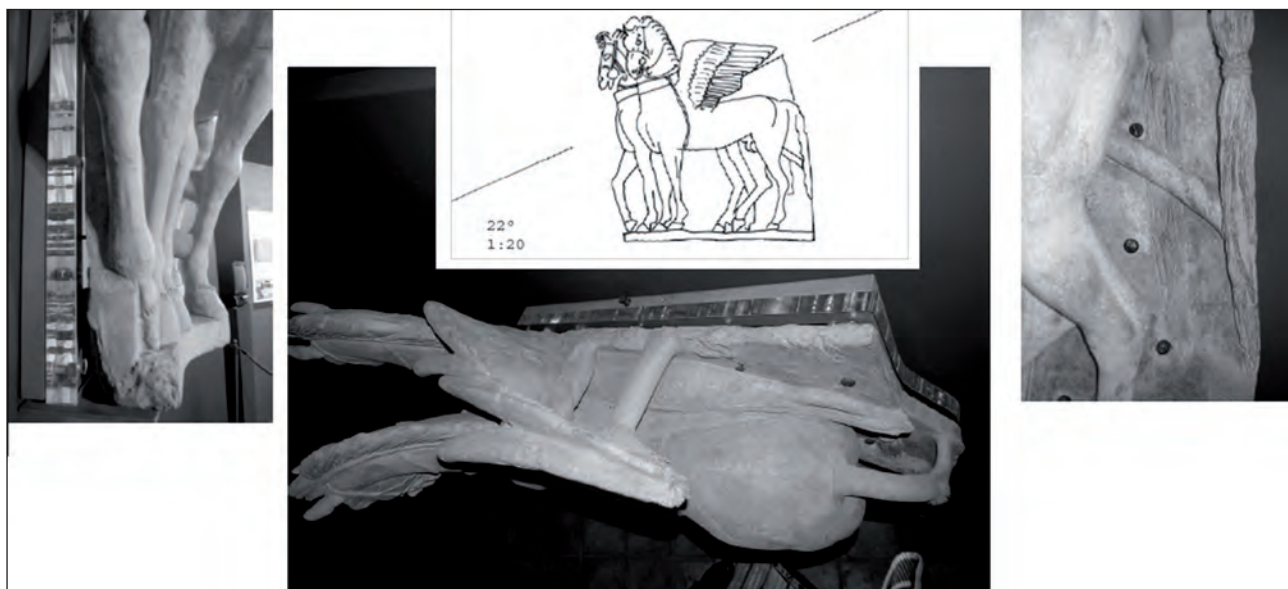


Fig. 2. The Winged Horses Group. Left: detail of the left side. Centre top: inclination of the background of the plaque. Centre bottom: photo from above. Right: detail of the right side. Tarquinia, MNT (Photos and drawing by Giovanna Bagnasco Gianni).

part of the pediment, as might be suggested by the detachment of the horses' heads and wings from the background in order to fit its triangular shape. Moreover, if we consider the third case proposed by A. Emiliozzi, the complete plaque dimensions would be incompatible with the presence of two more *mutuli* within a quite low pediment (22°). The simplest solution would be that of a 'closed' pediment with the Winged Horses Group placed at its top, an idea already suggested by M. Pallottino<sup>7</sup>. The curved line formed by the shelf on which the horses are placed could indicate the 'mise en page' of the Winged Horses Group, which could find a comparison in other figural compositions. Especially in the case of Apulian ware, whose influence on Etruscan 'Late Classical'-'Hellenistic' productions is well known<sup>8</sup>, lines of dots or waving lines separate figures occupying the upper level of supernatural presences from others below. This iconographic device is also employed on Etruscan vases and mirrors whenever different sectors or positions within the Etruscan Cosmos had to be established<sup>9</sup>. The recent restoration has made it possible to appreciate the sophisticated technique and to distinguish the different colours of the two horses: one is fair and the other dark<sup>10</sup>. For their different colour rendering, the Tarquinian horses are closer to the Attic stylistic achievements of local tomb painting, as in the case of the Tomba dei Demoni Azzurri. This is one of the reasons why we could

consider this masterpiece in the framework of the full Classical tradition linked to Attic sculpture after the Parthenon achievements<sup>11</sup>. A comparison with the local tradition of tomb painting could be the most convincing one, being consistent at Tarquinia for colourful effects and the rendering of details: the horses of the tomb of the Demoni Azzurri are represented in a similar position<sup>12</sup>. These horses, however, are wingless, as it is normal for Greek horses<sup>13</sup>. For this reason the coroplastic tradition in ancient Italy and Etruria is likely to be a more direct iconographic source.

For example, the best comparison for the heads of the horses is provided by two horse heads discovered by P. Orlandini on the acropolis of Gela, together with some fragments of wings probably belonging to sphinxes, dated within the first quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (fig. 3). These fragments on the whole could belong to groups likely anticipating those of Locri-Marafioti, datable thirty years later<sup>14</sup>.

The presence of wings implies supernatural scenes so that the comparison could also have an iconographical value. These horses are directed to upper levels through their own wings or through winged creatures, according to a scheme belonging more to Magna Graecia and Sicily than to Greece itself. In Greek art the pair formed by the horse and his rider remains on a very human level; at present the only exception is the winged horse protome of the East gallery of the Herakleion on Thasos of the 6<sup>th</sup>



Fig. 3. Left: head of the horse from the acropolis of Gela. Gela Museo Nazionale (RIZZA - DE MIRO 1985, fig. 251; the head is differently oriented for comparison with the head of the horse of the Winged Horses Group). Right: head of the first horse of the Winged Horses Group. Tarquinia, MNT (Photo by Giovanna Bagnasco Gianni).

century B.C. phase. Winged horses are also popular in Etruria on terracotta friezes of the First Phase, inspired by stylistic models from artistic centres in the vicinity of Siris and Metaponto. The Winged Horses Group shows its adherence to this tradition of Archaic equestrian friezes with a triumphal and victorious theme, with particular association with Herclé, but enhanced and renovated by the progressive detachment of heads and wings from the background. This detail could help in assessing a continuity of stylistic and iconographic motives at the Ara della Regina sanctuary<sup>15</sup>, as already noticed, concerning the relationship between terracotta friezes and antepagmenta<sup>16</sup>.

Recent studies of terracotta remains from the sanctuary (P. Romanelli; M. Bonghi Jovino) presented fragments belonging to the First Phase, including at least two athla of Herclé: the plaque with the cattle of Geryon and the pedimental high relief with the Hydra<sup>17</sup>.

Two more fragments are connected to the Winged Horses Group by style and technique: the bottom part of a female figure whose dress is decorated with star motifs and a vessel of closed form. They all share the same ceramic composition that recent chemical analyses have proven to be of local production<sup>18</sup>.

Considering all three surviving elements of the pediment horses, female figure, and vessel only the story of Herakles' apotheosis, after his burning on the pyre, seems to include all of them. Within the repertoire of earlier Attic red-figure pottery and on more or less contemporary Apulian figured ware, some iconographical schemes combine supernatural



Fig. 4. Pelike of the Kadmos Painter (Beazley). Munich, Antikensammlungen, inv. 2360 (LISSARRAGUE 1995, fig. 5).

horses, female figures and at least one closed-form vessel. Consequently the inspiration of the setting of the scene of apotheosis could be Attic, as demonstrated by the red-figure pelike attributed to the Painter of Kadmos (450-400 B.C.)<sup>19</sup>. Here the main scene is distributed over several levels and depicts the apotheosis of Herakles on Mount Oeta, after the pyre was quenched by the Hyades (fig. 4). The krater of the Painter of Lycurgus (370-350 B.C.) carries the same scene, separated by lines of dots, and proves its dissemination in local 'Late Classical'- 'Hellenistic' productions of the Italian peninsula.

Nevertheless, as already stated, the Winged Horses Group recalls the archaic theme of the apotheosis of Herclé with walking horses and could represent its later version in the triumphal and victorious dimension. Moreover the arrangement of the scene on different levels follows a stylistic, iconographic and iconological composition that seems to be wholly accepted in Etruscan art.

The biga with the walking Winged Horses could have been placed in the upper register of the pediment. Among the three possibilities suggested for the reconstruction of the chariot, the third one makes it possible to insert Herclé's apotheosis in the pediment with the head of the auriga in the middle and the hero mounting the chariot, symmetrically positioned behind the horses. In the bottom register, female figures, holding closed vessels, could be positioned around the remains of a possible pyre, according to the dimensions of the other two surviving elements associated with the pediment as a whole (fig. 5)<sup>20</sup>.

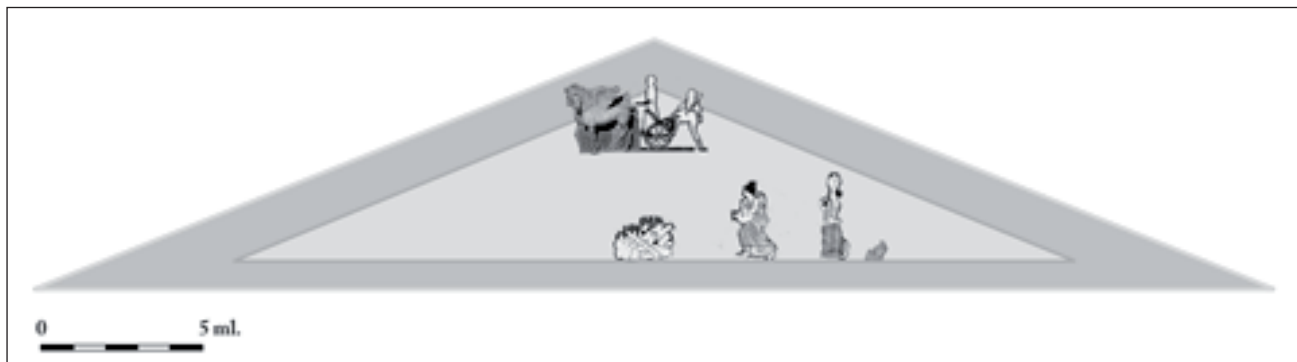


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the subject represented on the pediment of the third phase of the temple in the Ara della Regina sanctuary at Tarquinia (Temple III) (Drawing by Massimo Legni).

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<sup>1</sup> BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009a, 95-98.

<sup>2</sup> ROMANELLI 1938-1939; BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009a, 94-95.

<sup>3</sup> BONGHI JOVINO 2009.

<sup>4</sup> BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009a, 98-99.

<sup>5</sup> EMILIOZZI 2009.

<sup>6</sup> COLONNA 1985c. The width of the mutuli of the Ara della Regina temple, calculated at 180 cm (CRISTOFANI - COEN 1991-1992, 107, n. 27), has recently been considered too wide (CARLUCCI 2004a).

<sup>7</sup> PALLOTTINO 2002, 362; BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009a, 106-108. For further discussion of the 'closed' pediment of the Archaic temple of Sant'Omobono: COLONNA 1991b.

<sup>8</sup> FISCHER - HANSEN 1993; XENI - GAREZOU 1997, 104-105; DE GRUMMOND 2000-2001; BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009b.

<sup>9</sup> PALLOTTINO 1930; TORELLI 1988b, 112; DOBROWOLSKI 1991;

BAGNASCO GIANNI 2008.

<sup>10</sup> CATALDI - REINDELL - SANTARELLI 2008.

<sup>11</sup> COLONNA 1994, 587; MASSA PAIRAULT 1992, 101; CRISTOFANI 1992c.

<sup>12</sup> ADINOLFI - CARMAGNOLA - CATALDI 2005a, 45-56. This particular feature is also present in figured ware, both attic (MASSA PAIRAULT 1999, 537, n. 50) and apulian (DOLCI 2006).

<sup>13</sup> BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009a, 100-101.

<sup>14</sup> ORLANDINI 1958.

<sup>15</sup> BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009a, 102-104.

<sup>16</sup> COLONNA 1980, 307; TORELLI 1997a, 115.

<sup>17</sup> BONGHI JOVINO 1997, 88-89; CARLUCCI 2004b, 72-73 (for previous bibliography), 85, cat. I.e.30 (plaque with bearded snake), cat. I.e.29 (plaque with bulls), cat. I.e.31 (plaque with bull hooves); WINTER 2009a, 286, fig. 4.28.

<sup>18</sup> BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009a, 104-106.

<sup>19</sup> LISSARRAGUE 1995, 176-177, fig. 5.

<sup>20</sup> BAGNASCO GIANNI 2009a, 108-114.

# DELICIAE FICTILES IV

## Architectural Terracottas in Ancient Italy: Images of Gods, Monsters

In Ancient Italy, temples were adorned with full-figure architectural terracotta images such as acroteria, statuary groups and high reliefs. These terracottas mostly show complex scenes of gods and heroes, legendary battles and mythical animals, as well as large volutes and palmettes.

The fourth edition of the *Deliciae Fictiles* conferences focused on this specific class of mostly handmade terracotta roof decoration from Etruria and Central Italy, Campania, Magna Graecia and Sicily. The volume contains sixty contributions, publishing new material, new findings and many new reconstructions of this highly rare material, from all over Italy, from the Archaic period into the Hellenistic times. A vast bibliography and over seven hundred illustrations, many of which in color provide reference material for scholars and students of archaeology, ancient architecture and technique, art history and iconography.

Patricia S. Lulof and Carlo Rescigno are both well-known specialists and authors of many publications on the same subject.



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