



# Etruscan News



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## Remembering Mario Del Chiaro... 1925-2020

by Lisa C. Pieraccini

Mario Del Chiaro, the pioneer of Etruscan art and archaeology in the US, passed away at his home in Santa Barbara California on November 14, 2020. He was 95 years old. Mario's story is special: born in San Francisco in 1925, he was the son of Italian immigrants who left Italy to seek the American dream. He entered the

US Army-Air Force during WWII when he was only 17 years old. After service he received funding through the GI Bill which allowed him to pursue higher education. Mario started his university studies in 1949 at the University of California Berkeley and earned a BA, MA and PhD in the newly founded History of Art Department. Mario was one of the first PhDs (if not the first) in the department, and his dissertation was on an Etruscan topic, "The Genuclia Group" *continued on page 48*

## DIS MANIBUS SACRUM



Etruscan Mario brothers, California, 2013.



## In Memoriam Mario Torelli 1937-2020

by Stephan Steingraber

On September 15 Mario Torelli passed away in the heart of baroque Sicily, in Donnalucata di Sicli near Ragusa. He was 83 years old, but in spite of several health problems during the last decades, the sad message of his death was a surprise for many colleagues and friends, as he was still very active pre- *continued on page 52*

## Hidden in Plain Sight

### A surprising discovery on a terracotta plaque from Velletri featured in the exhibition "Gli Etruschi e il MANN" Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (2020-2021)

by Daniele F. Maras

An important Etruscan exhibition is currently on display at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, although the measures against the COVID-19 pandemic make it currently impossible to visit the show in person. "Gli Etruschi e il MANN" recounts the relationship between the museum of Naples and Etruscan culture, through 600 objects including archaeological contexts from Latium and Campania, as well as material from historical Italian

collections dating from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

A series of terracotta plaques from the site of the SS. Stimate at Velletri hold a special position in the exhibition, and the best preserved example has been chosen as the logo of the event (Fig. 1).

It is therefore astounding that this very object, known by scholars for over 200 years, still hid a surprise—and what a surprise!—which is now presented here for the

first time to the readers of *Etruscan News*. The discovery is due to the keen eagle eye of Gary Enea, *Etruscan News*' long-time layout editor, who never stops at the surface of things.

### Discovery and history of the plaques

As early as 1784, during the renovation of the church of S. Maria della Neve at Velletri (also known as "delle SS. Stimate di S. Francesco"), an excavation un-



Fig.1. Terracotta Plaque from Velletri, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli Inv. 21595.

earthed architectural terracottas of an Archaic temple, including a number of relief plaques with traces of painting. These were soon (and wrongly) labelled the "Volscian reliefs" and entered the collection of antiquities of the Borgia family, under the auspices of the learned and powerful Cardinal Stefano Borgia. After a first restoration, they were published by Filippo Angelo Becchetti with colored watercolors by the painter *continued on page 6*

## ETRUSCAN NEWS

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Etruscan Interest Group at the A.I.A. annual meeting in Washington D.C, January 2020.  
We don't have to name names. You all know who you are!

**Dear Editors:**

*Grazie anzitutto per quanto comunicati di Etruscan News e desidero esprimerti anzitutto il più vivo compiacimento per l'iniziativa di proseguire il prezioso impegno profuso dalla cara Larissa Bonfante che ricordo volentieri sia come studiosa, sia anche per la sua puntuale presenza e attenzione per ogni nuova iniziativa promossa a Villa Giulia, nel territorio dell'Etruria meridionale e non solo.*

Anna Maria Moretti Sgubini  
Roma

**Dear Editors:**

I am putting a few words together because I would like to honor Larissa.

Creativity, freedom, individuality, naturalness, simplicity, spontaneity are all words a variety of writers have used to describe the Etruscans. I can use these words to describe Larissa. From the time I was with Jane at Spannocchia and worked with her team at La Piana, I have been attending Etruscan events as well as visiting Etruscan sites. This is now 25 years ago and it was at one of these seminars that I met Larissa and she, with all her commitments, writing and teaching was so welcoming and encouraging to me and our daughter, Kim. I am now surrounded by her books and just last night was reading one of the last, *Giuliano Bonfante and Historical Linguistics*. I particularly like "A Daughter's Memories"...and now you are working on more writings that will continue her legacy.

Photo at left, Barbara's boars betwixt the books.

That is why I am grateful to you for printing in *The Etruscan News* the picture of our grandson, Marshall, who with his 3D printing made a copy of the sarcophagus in Perugia. Now he has made one of the Porcellino from Florence. If you ask any of our five grandchildren my chief interest, they would all say, "the Etruscans"...so the seeds have been planted and are growing.

Another grandson, Peter, is now a sophomore at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland. I was most fortunate to visit him last in early March, just before we became housebound. Peter immediately took me to The Cleveland Museum of Art and directly to the Etruscan Collection, which is outstanding. The family had previously gifted me a replica of an Etruscan Boar (see photo) which the head curator of Ancient Civilizations is now suggesting has a different background. The additional objects there include a boar pendant...and so many other things. So the Etruscans are alive and well within our family. Daughter Kim still enjoys the Etruscan room in her Boulder home...and we have so much here.

In the very large picture, Larissa will continue to be our important bridge to Italy and to the Etruscans. She certainly lives on in her many books and contributions in many ways and her spirit continues to inspire me.

Barbara Martini Johnson  
Minneapolis

**Dear Editors:**

Musings about Larissa: Many of you might not know that Larissa was born in Naples, Italy (bella Napoli). When she came to visit me two years ago, I introduced her as a Neapolitan. I cannot tell you how much joy that elicited from the various people she met. Everyone took pride in the fortunate circumstances of her birth and attributed her genius and sympathetic character to being Neapolitan. Even a taxi driver, when questioned as to where she was from said, "she's Neapolitan, you can see it in her face and in her soul." Another Neapolitan engaged her in a conversation regarding the meaning of "troia." In Naples, the word is derogatory, indicating a woman of loose morals. Larissa explained that in Sicily, the surname "Troia" was quite common and it harkened back to the remembrance of the glorious city of Troy and Aeneas' subsequent arrival on the island of Sicily.

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# MOVIE REVIEWS



Director versus director, author with Matteo Rovere in his studio (Photo: A. Tanzarella).

## From Movie to Museum An unprecedented collaboration between the Villa Giulia and a major international television series

by Valentino Nizzo

Director of the National Museum of the Villa Giulia

My meeting with Matteo Rovere, director and producer of the *Romulus* series, happened almost by chance in February 2019, thanks to an “archaeoreview” of his highly acclaimed film “Il Primo Re,” “The First King,” published on my YouTube channel Etruschannel. The brilliant young director asked me to collaborate as a consultant on the series being produced by Britian’s Sky TV. The movie was already almost entirely outlined in the plot and essential characters. Thus in the museum galleries I suddenly found myself not only commenting on the scripts with the authors, set designers, costume designers, prop makers, scriptwriters, and assistant directors, but also verifying the sets once they were set up.

Unusual questions arose that could range from the correctness of a certain actor’s expression to what they ate, to the interior furnishings, the choice and reconstruction of a scene, or the method of measuring time and space. (At the same time, I also arranged the making of a documentary related to the series, shot almost entirely inside the National Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia.) Not all of my suggestions were accepted, either



for the sake of the narrative or for such issues as safety. The use of stirrups and the very practice of riding, or the presence of windows in Villanovan huts are details that could not be corrected. Also, the characters of augurs and haruspices, in an era in which the King most likely drew the auspices or interpreted divine will, were narrative liberties deemed necessary by the authors to give movement to the plot.

On the one hand, the approach of the creators and directors to this new saga is characteristic of fiction that aims to attract the general public and consequently must *Below*, scenes from the *Romulus* series taken from Sky-Now TV (Photos: F. Fago.)



feed on some necessary stereotypes and narrative conventions. On the other hand, it aims with great courage and intelligence to propose a hyper-realistic myth-historical landscape. But the literary tradition contains innumerable anachronisms and contradictions, and it is also not possible to offer a realistic and correct image of the 8th century BC as we know it from the archaeological record. With *Romulus* we are therefore faced with an anthropological reconstructive process, with fantasy, but starting from mythological and narrative archetypes based on the sources.

In the plot, examples of this are the ceremonial initiation rites of the Luperci and the invention of the Ruminales people — a group of youths devoted to a newly invented goddess, Lupa/Rumia — who were forced to



The author inside a hut rebuilt on the set of *Romulus* in July 2019. (Photo: S. Sanchirico).

leave their homeland according to the practice of the *Ver Sacrum*. The whole narrative fabric is aimed at re-establishing legend on a new basis, the mythical and sociological heritage of the period.

Critics and commentators will have a lot of fun trying to identify the many learned references hidden among the folds of the series: from the temple of Vesta, its structure based on the bronze hut urn from Vulci preserved in Villa Giulia; to the cat called Mau, inspired by one found in the excavation of a hut at Fidene; to the ancillia shields hanging on the walls of the cave of Attus and reproduced from those found in tomb 1036 of Veio’s Casale del Fosso; to the name of the Greek potter Eulinos.

The *Romulus* series also represented a very ambitious narrative challenge in the use of the languages artificially reconstructed, such as Proto-Latin or Oscan. For those like me who had to supervise its historical content and verify its archaeological credibility, it was a unique experience. In many respects it was necessary to make a leap of imagination, but I approached this goal with the pleasure and fascination of seeing what I have studied for years manifested in the film, of seeing an anonymous Latin people - certainly not those we have studied in books – come to life, act, suffer, die, fight, and fall in love. It has been a stimulating experience, a challenge to bring the widest possible audience closer to an era that has been an extraordinary moment in western history and, we hope, to inspire them to look for what they saw on television inside the halls of an extraordinary but still little visited museum such as the Villa Giulia.

