

## Shadows of Power: Female Identity and Indigenous Demon Figures in Etruria

Beginning in the fifth century, B.C.E., the funerary imagery of ancient Etruria clearly began to illustrate an amalgamation of Greek oriented myth that coalesced with indigenous myth. Yet demon and spirit figures, believed to have been native to Etruria, often interacted within Greek mythological scenes, thereby reinventing them for the Etruscan viewer. One such demon, the female figure of Vanth, has perplexed scholars for generations. She has been called a psychopomp, a fury, and even a chthonic form of Aphrodite with apotropaic characteristics.

Moreover, a variety of convincing arguments have been proposed that tie Vanth's origins to outside peoples, such as the Celts or the Greeks. The first mention of the name itself emerged at the end of the seventh century, B.C.E. However, Vanth is not illustrated in Etruscan iconography until centuries later, during the fourth century. Thereafter, Vanth figures were illustrated on a variety of mediums such as tomb painting, cinerary urns, mirrors and pottery in four city states: Tarquinia, Vulci, Chiusi and Orvieto (ancient Volsinii).

While a variety of winged beings existed in Etruria, Vanth herself may be additionally identified via her male counterpart, Charu. Charu and Vanth were physically quite disparate. Charu, as well as other demon figures, were often shown in an animalistic manner, while Vanth was never illustrated as anything other than physically human. In fact, she was depicted just as the Etruscan elite woman was: Beautiful, capable and unique. When one quantitatively assesses the illustration and evolution of Vanth figures, juxtaposed with that of elite females, a series of patterns tend to emerge within the modeling and positioning of the female body.

A chronological survey of Vanth figures, as compared to female elites, dating between the fifth through third centuries B.C.E. is presented. Primary focus is given to tomb paintings, cinerary urns, and sarcophagi. Utilizing data ascertained from the survey, I propose that a

repetitive series of positions for the figure of Vanth and female elites, particularly from cities along the southern coast, evolved in a strikingly analogous manner. Ultimately, I argue that Vanth was not simply utilized as an apotropaic tool to be deployed en route to the Etruscan underworld, but rather as a commanding figure in her own right and one who perhaps developed into a powerful prototype of the Etruscan elite woman herself.