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THE *HIRPI SORANI* AND THE WOLF CULTS OF CENTRAL ITALY

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The impressive ridge of Mt. Soracte, the only mountain in the lower Tiber valley, is situated 45 kilometres north of Rome, its highest peak being 691 metres above sea level (about 500 metres higher than its surroundings). It was known as the site of the cult practised by priests called Hirpi Sorani. The region around about was inhabited by the Faliscans, a tribe who spoke a language related to Latin. Politically and culturally the Faliscans were closely connected with the Etruscans until the 5th century BCE, when the expanding city-state of Rome occupied their territory. In this paper I discuss the cult of the Hirpi Sorani, comparing it with other wolf cults of central Italy, analysing the common elements of these cults, and suggesting that the cults have a common origin.

The earliest literary source which mentions the cult of the Hirpi Sorani is Virgil's *Aeneid*.¹ Strabo gives a more detailed description in his *Geographia* (written between 7 BCE and 23 CE).² Other valuable sources are Pliny the El-

¹ Verg. *Aen.* 11,784–788: (- -) *superos Arruns sic voce precatur: / "summe deum, sancti custos Soractis Apollo, / quem primi colimus, cui pineus ardor acervo / pascitur, et medium freti pietate per ignem / cultores multa premimus vestigia pruna"* "Arruns (- -) prayed aloud, like this, to heaven: 'Highest of gods, Apollo, guardian of holy Soracte, whose chief followers are we for whom the blaze of the pine-wood fire is fed, and who as worshippers, confident in our faith, plant our steps on deep embers among the flames.' " (translated by A. S. Kline)

² Strabo 5,226: ἥς τέμενος ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ θαυμαστὴν ἱεροποιίαν ἔχον· γυμνοῖς γὰρ ποσὶ διεξίασιν ἀνθρακίαν καὶ σποδιὰν μεγάλην οἱ κατεχόμενοι ὑπὸ τῆς δαίμονος ταύτης ἀπαθειῆς· καὶ συνέρχεται πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων ἅμα τῆς τε πανηγύρεως χάριν, ἢ συντελεῖται κατ' ἔτος, καὶ τῆς λεχθείσης θεάς. "Her sacred precinct is in the place; and it has remarkable ceremonies, for those who are possessed by this goddess walk with bare feet through a great heap of embers and ashes without suffering; as a multitude of people come together at the same time, for the sake not only of attending the festal assembly, which is held here every year, but also of seeing the aforesaid sight." (translated by H. L. Jones)

der (about 70 CE),³ Silius Italicus (late 1st century),⁴ Solinus (3rd or 4th century, strongly leaning on Pliny)⁵ and Servius (5th century).⁶ The oldest epigraphical sources date back to the 1st century BCE.

The cult was practised once a year, but no author mentions the exact date of the ritual.⁷ Pliny and Solinus write that it was practised by certain families which were exempt from military service because of their religious responsibilities. Ac-

³ Plin. nat. 7,19: *Haud procul urbe Roma in Faliscorum agro familiae sunt paucae quae vocantur Hirpi. Hae sacrificio annuo, quod fit ad montem Soractem Apollini, super ambustam ligni struem ambulantes non aduruntur et ob id perpetuo senatus consulto militiae omniumque aliorum munerum vacationem habent.* "There are a few families in the Faliscan territory, not far from the city of Rome, named the Hirpi, which at the yearly sacrifice to Apollo performed on Mount Soracte walk over a charred pile of logs without being scorched, and who consequently enjoy under a perpetual decree of the senate exemption from military service and all other burdens." (translated by H. Rackham)

⁴ Sil. 5,175–183: *Tum Soracte satum, praestantem corpore et armis, / Aequanum noscens, patrio cui ritus in arvo, / cum pius Arcitenens accensis gaudet acervis, / exta ter innocuos laetum portare per ignes, / "Sic in Apollinea semper vestigia pruna / inviolata teras victorque vaporis ad aras / dona serenato referas sollemnia Phoebo: / concipe" ait "dignum factis, Aequane, furorem / vulneribusque tuis. (- -)"* "Next he recognized Aequanus, a son of Mount Soracte, a splendid figure in splendid armour: in his native land it was his task to carry the offerings thrice in triumph over harmless fires, at the time when Archer, the loving son, takes pleasure in the blazing piles. 'Aequanus,' cried the general, 'fill your heart with wrath that suits your prowess and your wounds; and then may you ever tread unhurt over Apollo's fire, and conquer the flame, and carry the customary offerings to the altar, while Phoebus smiles.' " (translated by J. D. Duff)

⁵ Sol 2,26: *Memorabilibus inclutum et insigniter per omnium vulgatum ora, quod perpaucae familiae sunt in agro Faliscorum quos Hirpos vocant. Hi sacrificium annuum ad Soractis montem Apollini faciunt; ad operantes gesticulationibus religiosis impune exultant ardentibus lignorum struibus, in honorem divinae rei flammis parentibus. Cuius devotionis mysterium munificentia senatus honorata Hirpis perpetuo consulto omnium munerum vacationem dedit.* "It is worth remembering and is known by everyone, that there are a few families in the Faliscan territory that are called *Hirpi*. They perform a yearly sacrifice to Apollo on Mount Soracte. While performing their religious acts they jump unscathed on flaming piles of wood in honor of the divinity that controls the flames. Because of their devotion to the mystery, the senate has generously honored the *Hirpi* with perpetual exemption from all official duties." (translated by the author)

⁶ Serv. *Aen.* 11,785. See the text below in the note 33.

⁷ Plin. nat. 7,19; Sol. 2,26; Strabo 5,226. E. Marbach ("Soranus", *RE* III A.1 [1929] 1131) believes that the cult was probably practiced in the winter to create the contrast between the cold environment and the purifying fire.

ording to Solinus, this exemption was an honour.⁸ However, this opinion is not accepted by G. Piccaluga, who regards the exemption as a precaution, because the Romans found priesthoods with a direct connection to the divinities too suspicious and strange.⁹

Identification of the families of the Hirpi Sorani is not uncontroversial. Pliny and Solinus refer to certain families that live in the Faliscan region, but they do not explicitly say that they were Faliscans. Instead, this definition is made by Strabo, Porphyrio and Vibius Sequester.¹⁰ Servius, on the other hand, writes that Mt. Soracte was located in the territory of the Hirpini, who also practised the ritual.¹¹ His view is probably mistaken and he may have been misled by the similarity of the names, as will be shown below. Even though the priesthood consisted of members of only certain families, the whole community joined in the ritual. Strabo describes a multitude of people gathering to attend the ritual.¹²

The descriptions of the ritual given by Pliny the Elder, Solinus and Strabo are very similar. First, a pile of wood had to be burned down to glowing embers. Virgil is the only author who describes the wood more explicitly as pine,¹³ which however can be due to poetic or metric reasons.

Then the priests walked barefoot across the embers without feeling any pain. Silius Italicus writes that the priests performed their walk three times, carrying offerings to the god. Servius too speaks in the plural about the walks.¹⁴ While all the other sources write about "taking steps" or "walking", Solinus describes the priests' motion as "leaping" (*exultant*).¹⁵ The word *exultare* often includes a connotation of rejoicing.¹⁶ The atmosphere of the ritual seems in fact to have been joyful rather than frightening. Silius Italicus describes Apollo being happy about the blazing piles of wood and the offerings.¹⁷

⁸ For further examples of an exemption as a reward, see e.g. Liv. 23,20; 27,38.

⁹ G. Piccaluga, "I Marsi e gli Hirpi", in P. Xella (ed.), *Magia. Studi di Storia delle Religioni in Memoria di Raffaella Garosi*, Roma 1976, 211–6 and 228. Livy (27,10) relates an example where the exclusion from official duties was used as a communal punishment by the Romans.

¹⁰ Strabo 5,226; Porph. *Hor. carm.* 1,9; Vib.Seq. *geogr.* 367.

¹¹ Serv. *Aen.* 11,785; 11,787.

¹² Strabo 5,226. Cf. Sil. 5,175–176.

¹³ Verg. *Aen.* 11,786.

¹⁴ Sil. 5,178; Serv. *Aen.* 11,785.

¹⁵ Sol. 2,26.

¹⁶ C. T. Lewis – C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford 1879, s.v. *exulto*.

¹⁷ Sil. 5,178; 5,182. Also the word *pascitur* used by Virgil (*Aen.* 11,787) has a connotation of

All these authors point out that the priests were able to perform the ritual without burning their feet.¹⁸ The explanation given by Varro, transmitted by Servius, is that the priests used medicated ointment to moisturize their soles,¹⁹ while Silius Italicus refers to some kind of trance that protected the priests.²⁰ Virgil too says that the priests piously put their trust in the god while walking across the embers.²¹

On the basis of their name, the Hirpi Sorani were "the wolves of Soranus", *hirpus* being the Faliscan (or Sabellic, as G. Bakkum suggests)²² equivalent for Latin *lupus*²³ and *Soranus* the name of the god worshipped in the area.²⁴ It is less plausible to see *Soranus* as an adjective derived either from the Etruscan family name *Sora* or the homonymous Volscan town. Both Pliny and Solinus speak about priest families in the plural, which seems to rule out a connection with one particular family. Nor does the Volscan town of Sora, situated 100 kilometres eastwards, seem to have anything to do with the cult. There doubtless is a connection between the names of *Soracte* and *Soranus*. However, the derivation of *Soranus* directly from the name of the mountain (**Sorāct-nus*), as suggested by W. Deecke,²⁵ is linguistically unacceptable.²⁶

Two inscriptions have been found in the region of Mt. Soracte which contain the name of the god, one at the northern foot of the mountain, near the city of Falerii (now Civit  Castellana),²⁷ the other on the peak.²⁸ In both cases the dedi-

enjoyment.

¹⁸ Plin. *nat.* 7,19; Sil. 5,179–181; Sol. 2,26; Strabo 5,226.

¹⁹ Serv. *Aen.* 11,787.

²⁰ Sil. 5,182–183.

²¹ Verg. *Aen.* 11,787–788.

²² G. C. L. M. Bakkum, *The Latin Dialect of the Ager Faliscus*, Amsterdam 2009, 98.

²³ Fest. *p.* 106M; Strabo 5,226; Serv. *Aen.* 11,785. This is accepted also by e.g. A. Walde – J. B. Hofmann, *Lateinisches etymologisches W rterbuch*, I–II, Heidelberg 1938, 650, s.v. *hircus*.

²⁴ Cf. W. F. Otto, "Hirpi Sorani", *RE* VIII.2 (1913) 1935.

²⁵ W. Deecke, *Die Falisker. Eine Geschichtlich-Sprachliche Untersuchung*, Strassburg 1888, 97.

²⁶ Otto (above n. 24) 1935; M. Fluss, "Soracte", *RE* III A.1 (1929) 1112.

²⁷ *CIL* XI 7485 = *ILS* 4034: *C. Varius Hermes | Sancto Sorano | Apollini pro sal(ute) sua* "Gaius Varius Hermes to the sacred Apollo Soranus for his own health (- -)" (translated by the author)

²⁸ I. Di Stefano Manzella, "Nuova dedica a Soranus Apollo e altre iscrizioni dal Soratte

cation is made to *Apollo Soranus*. In the literary texts the god is usually called Apollo without any epithet.²⁹ On the other hand, Servius identifies Soranus with Dis, the Roman god of the Underworld and death;³⁰ this is the only literary reference to a god called Soranus in Italy. In addition to the dedications mentioned above, the only epigraphical source on Soranus has been found in Alburnus Maior in Dacia.³¹ Ultimately, the name of the god (and thus the name of the mountain) is probably to be connected with *Śuri*, the Etruscan god of purification and prophecies (which will be discussed in detail below), as suggested by G. Colonna.³²

Servius is the best source regarding the origin of the cult and the reason why the priests were considered wolves. He says: "Mount Soracte is located in the territory of the Hirpini next to Via Flaminia. It was on this mountain that a sacrifice to *Dis Pater* was once performed – because it is devoted to chthonic deities – as wolves suddenly appeared and plundered the entrails from the fire. The shepherds chased the wolves for a long time, until they arrived at a cave emanating pestilential gases that killed people standing nearby. The reason for the emergence of this plague was that they had chased the wolves. They received a message that they could calm it down by imitating wolves; that means, living by plundering. They did so, and since then these people have been called *Hirpi Sorani*."³³

(*AE* 1992, 594)", *MEFRA* 104 (1992) 159: *Sorano | Apollini | d(onum) d(edit) | Ti. Caei(us) Atim[etus]* "To Apollo Soranus dedicated by Ti(berius) Caei(us) Atim[etus]". (translated by the author)

²⁹ Verg. *Aen.* 11,785–788; Plin. *nat.* 7,19; Sil. 5,175–181; Sol. 2,26.

³⁰ Serv. *Aen.* 11,785. Strabo (5,226) calls the god *Feronia*. This is probably a misunderstanding due to a nearby town called *Lucus Feroniae*, as suggested by Marbach (above n. 7) 1133. *Feronia* was known as a goddess of harvest and waters, of Sabine origin. Compared with the other known cult places of *Feronia*, the barren ridge of Mt. Soracte does not seem to fit in the picture. Cf. Plin. *nat.* 3,51; Liv. 26,11; Sil. 13,84 speaking about *lucus Feroniae*, "a grove of *Feronia*"; M. Di Fazio, "Feronia. The Role of an Italic Goddess in the Process of Integration of Cultures in Republican Italy", in S. T. Roselaar (ed.), *Processes of Integration and Identity Formation in the Roman Republic*, Leiden 2012, 337–42.

³¹ *AE* 1990, 832 = *ILD* 364: *Soran[o] | posui[t k(astellum)] | An/si[s] | v(otum) l(ibens) [m(erito)]*. Cf. S. Nemeti, "Bindus-Neptus and Ianus Geminus at Alburnus Maior (Dacia)", *SHHA* 22 (2004) 98.

³² In Faliscan, as in Latin, the suffix *-nus* was commonly used in the derivation of the names of divinities (cf. *silva* → *Silvanus*, *summa* → *Summanus*). According to G. Colonna ("Novità sui culti di Pyrgi", *RPAA* 57 [1985] 76 n. 58) the Faliscan *Soranus* was derived from the Etruscan *Śuri* (→ **Suranus* → *Soranus*). Cf. A. Cherici, "Suri", *LIMC* VII.1, Zürich 1994, 823–4.

³³ Serv. *Aen.* 11,785: *Soractis mons est Hirpinorum in Flaminia conlocatus. In hoc autem*



Figs. 1, 2: Etruscan late black-figure neck-amphora, c. 500 BCE, height 20,6 cm. Private collection, Basel. (From Bloesch [ed.] [below n. 39])

The legend might indicate that the wolf was considered to be a sacred animal and its harassment some kind of taboo in the archaic religion of the Faliscans.³⁴ The wolf could have been regarded as a messenger from the divinities, as it was among the Romans.³⁵ In Rome the wolf was mostly associated with Mars, whereas in Greece wolves carried annunciations of Apollo.³⁶

monte cum aliquando Diti patri sacrum persolveretur – nam diis manibus consecratus est – subito venientes lupi exta de igni rapuerunt, quos cum diu pastores sequerentur, delati sunt ad quandam speluncam, halitum ex se pestiferum emittentem, adeo ut iuxta stantes necaret: et exinde est orta pestilentia, quia fuerant lupos secuti. De qua responsum est, posse eam sedari, si lupos imitarentur, id est raptu viverent. Quod postquam factum est, dicti sunt ipsi populi Hirpi Sorani. (translated by the author)

³⁴ A. Mastrocinque, "Influenze delfiche su Soranus Apollo, dio dei Falisci", in A. Naso (ed.), *Stranieri e non cittadini nei santuari greci*, Firenze 2006, 90.

³⁵ E.g. Liv. 3,29,9; 33,26,9; Cass. Dio 39,20,2; 40,17,1. Cf. J. Trinquier, "Les loups sont entrés dans la ville: de la peur du loup à la hantise de la cite ensauvagée", in M.-C. Charpentier (ed.), *Les espaces du sauvage dans la monde antique. Colloque Besançon, 4-5 mai 2000, organisé par l'ISTA*, Besançon 2004, 85–118.

³⁶ Paus. 2,19,4; 10,6,2; 10,14,7; Ael. nat. 12,40.

As to the priests living like wolves, E. Marbach suggests that "living by plundering" (*id est rapto viverent*) is an explanation added by Servius, not an element of the original cult.³⁷ The priests were most probably considered to be wolves spiritually or symbolically, because there is no evidence of any masks or articles of clothing that would have made them look like wolves. Virgil uses the wolf connotation in the *Aeneid* when he describes Arruns (who was mentioned as being from Soracte) fleeing out of sight to pathless mountains like a wolf after killing a shepherd or an ox.³⁸

On a small Etruscan neck-amphora dating from about 500 BCE (Figs. 1, 2) there are similar elements to those in the birth legend of Hirpi Sorani narrated by Servius. On the amphora there are two priests performing a sacrifice on an altar. On one side there are canines running back and forth on inclined shelves of another altar. The scene is interpreted as representing a plundering of sacrificial flesh.³⁹ However, as the time span between the amphora and Servius is almost a millennium, there must be some doubt about any connection of the painting with the story.

The exact location of the cult site on Mt. Soracte is unknown. There are good reasons to believe that the ritual was performed on the highest peak (S. Silvestro) of the mountain. One of the dedications to *Apollo Soranus* was found right there during maintenance work on the church of S. Silvestro in 1980.⁴⁰ In Christian legends the mountain is associated with St. Sylvester, who hid in the caves of Mt. Soracte during the persecutions of the early 4th century. The emperor Constantine, after his conversion to Christianity, ordered a church dedicated to Sylvester to be built on the top of the mountain.⁴¹ This place could be one of many examples in which a Christian church is a continuation of ancient religious practices.

For Christians, caves did not have the same sort of chthonic associations as they did for other Romans, who regarded them as passages to the Underworld. The appearance of caves in both the pagan and the Christian legend may be pure

³⁷ Marbach (above n. 7) 1131. Cf. above n. 33.

³⁸ Verg. *Aen.* 11,806–811.

³⁹ H. Bloesch (ed.), *Das Tier in der Antike*, Zürich 1974, 54 n. 325; S. Bruni, "Nugae de Etruscorum fabulis", *Ostraka* 11 (2002) 12–24.

⁴⁰ Di Stefano Manzella (above n. 28) 159.

⁴¹ M. Andreussi, "Soratte", *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* IV (1988) 947. According to the legend, the emperor Constantine recovered from leprosy after having met Sylvester (later Pope Sylvester I, 314–335).

coincidence. Mt. Soracte is a limestone ridge where there are dozens of caves. However, no indication of caves (or ponds) exhaling mephitic, lethal gases, as described by Pliny, Vitruvius and Servius,⁴² can be found. There is, however, a spring with water rich in iron, called *Acqua Forte*, about five kilometres north of Mt. Soracte. This is often considered to be the origin of the stories about Soracte's lethal gases.⁴³

Silius Italicus is the only one who mentions that the Hirpi Sorani carried offerings,⁴⁴ possibly because a sacrifice was so self-evident in ancient rituals that any mention of it would have been unnecessary. The sacrifice seems not to have been the most important part of the ritual on Mt. Soracte. Instead, the climax of the cult was the walk across the glowing embers.

Fire was widely recognized as a purifying element in the ancient world.⁴⁵ However, the fire in the ritual of the Hirpi Sorani cannot be considered as the primal force of purification, only its visible symbol. The deeper significance of the walk can be found in the nature of the god that was worshipped: Soranus, god of the Underworld and death.

The name of the priesthood and the epigraphical dedications indicate that the ritual was originally devoted to Soranus. However, as Colonna points out, the identification of Soranus with Greek Apollo was made by the Faliscans as early as the 5th century BCE.⁴⁶ According to A. Mastrocinque, the Faliscan cult was probably seen as parallel to the cult of Apollo in Delphi in the early 4th century, during the siege of Veii, already.⁴⁷ There certainly are many parallels between Mt.

⁴² Plin. *nat.* 2,207; Vitr. 8,3,17; Serv. *Aen.* 11,785. Cf. Plin. *nat.* 31,27 on a mephitic pond at Mt. Soracte.

⁴³ E.g. A. Nibby, *Analisi storico-topografico-antiquaria della carta de' Dintorni di Roma III*, Roma 1837, 112; G. Dennis, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, London 1837,188; Mastrocinque (above n. 34) 88.

⁴⁴ Sil. 5,181.

⁴⁵ E.g. Strabo (12,537) gives us a description about the cult of Artemis Perasia in Cappadocia, where the priests walk through fire in order to purify their community. See J. J. Preston, "Purification", *The Encyclopedia of Religion XII*, New York 1987, 95–6.

⁴⁶ G. Colonna, "Apollon, les Étrusques et Lipara", *MEFRA* 96 (1984) 572; G. Colonna, "Noti preliminari sui culti del santuario di Portonaccio a Veio", *Scienze dell'antichità* 1 (1987) 433. Cf. D. F. Maras, "Note in margine al *CIE* II, 1, 5", *SE* 73 (2007) 246–7.

⁴⁷ Mastrocinque (above n. 34) 85–97.

Soracte and Delphi (references to mephitic caves,⁴⁸ myths about guiding wolves⁴⁹ and the connection of Apollo with wolves) and it is undeniable that Apollo was held in great respect by the Faliscans.⁵⁰ However, Greek influences should not be overestimated at the expense of Italic roots, especially as some of the parallels mentioned above (wolves, caves) can be found in other cults of central Italy, too.

We should therefore rather compare the role of Soranus with Etruscan Śuri. Colonna's identification of Śuri with Soranus seems plausible.⁵¹ Even though no illustrations of Śuri exist, epigraphical evidence gives a good idea of the nature of the god. Śuri was an Underworld god who had both purifying and oracular powers.⁵² Through Roman and Hellenic influences Śuri was assimilated with Apollo in the 4th century BCE and was called *Aplu*.⁵³ Besides the Apollonic nature, Śuri had its original chthonic side, which became emphasized in the Faliscan counterpart Soranus.⁵⁴ This chthonic aspect of Soranus–Śuri explains Servius' reference to Dis as the god worshipped in the ritual of Mt. Soracte.

As Servius mentions in the birth legend of the Hirpi Sorani,⁵⁵ the cult was a purification ritual. The purification was symbolized by the glowing embers – and the priests' miraculous walk across them, unscathed – and it was provided by the forces of the Underworld. The Hirpi Sorani priests, symbolically representing wolves, walked through the fire to the world of death and back, thus performing a purifying ritual for the whole community.⁵⁶

The Hirpi Sorani and the inhabitants of the region of Mt. Soracte were mistaken for the Hirpini by Servius, as mentioned above. The Hirpini, whose name is also derived from the word *hirpus* were a Samnite tribe, living in the Apennine

⁴⁸ Serv. *Aen.* 11,785. E.g. Strabo 9,419; Cic. *div.* 1,79; Plin. *nat.* 2,208.

⁴⁹ Serv. *Aen.* 11,785. Paus. 10,6,2; 10,14,7; Ael. *nat.* 12, 40. Cf. the guiding wolf among the Hirpini, Strabo 5,250; Fest. *p.* 106M.

⁵⁰ G. Colonna, *Santuari d'Etruria*, Milano 1985, 86–8; Mastrocinque (above n. 34) 87.

⁵¹ Accepted also by e.g. A. Comella ("Apollo Soranus? Il programma figurativo del tempio dello Scasato di Falerii", *Ostraka* 1 [1993] 313–5) and Mastrocinque (above n. 34) 86–7.

⁵² Colonna (above n. 32) 74–8; Mastrocinque (above n. 34); G. Colonna, "L'Apollo di Pyrgi, Śur / Śuri ("il Nero") e l'Apollo *Sourios*", *SE* 73 (2007) 109–13.

⁵³ Colonna (above n. 32) 77, n. 69; Colonna (1987, above n. 46) 433.

⁵⁴ Colonna (above n. 32) 76–7; Colonna (2007, above n. 52) 113–4.

⁵⁵ Serv. *Aen.* 11,785. See above n. 33.

⁵⁶ Modern scholars agree with the interpretation of the Hirpi Sorani cult as a purificatory cult, see, e.g., G. Wissowa, "Hirpi Sorani", *Ausführliches Lexicon der Griechischen und Römischen Mythologie* I, Leipzig 1886, 2694; Marbach (above n. 7) 1131; Andreussi (above n. 41) 946–7.

mountains, more than 200 kilometres south-east of Mt. Soracte. Strabo and Festus tells us how the people were led to their dwelling-place by a guiding wolf.⁵⁷ A. Alföldi supposes that the Faliscans and the Samnite Hirpini shared a common origin but were separated at an early stage.⁵⁸

In addition, the Faliscans and the Hirpini share stories about pestilential caves with chthonic associations. Virgil tells us about a cave called *Ampsanctus*, the main religious cult site of the Hirpini, which led to the Underworld and exhaled pestilential gases.⁵⁹ However, the connection between the Hirpi Sorani and the fairly distant Hirpini is very uncertain. The cult of Mt. Soracte should rather be compared with certain cults practised in the adjacent region around Rome and in Southern Etruria.

* * *

In central Italy the best known religious ritual associated with wolves was the Roman festival of the Lupercalia, celebrated annually on February 15th until 494 CE, when Pope Gelasius I succeeded in suppressing it.⁶⁰ The cult of the Hirpi Sorani and the Lupercalia have often been discussed together, mostly concentrating on the latter.⁶¹ There are several points of resemblance between these two rituals, the most obvious one being that regarding priesthoods. The name of the priest *lupercus* is derived from *lupus* "wolf", either with a suffix⁶² or through a rhotacism

⁵⁷ Strabo 5,250; Fest. *p.* 106M.

⁵⁸ A. Alföldi, *Die Struktur des voretruskischen Römerstaates*, Heidelberg 1974, 77. Also Piccaluga (above n. 9) 224.

⁵⁹ Verg. *Aen.* 7,563–571. Also Cic. *div.* 1,36,79; Plin. *nat.* 2,207–208; Serv. *Aen.* 7,563.

⁶⁰ For studies of the Lupercalia see, e.g., A. Kirsopp Michels, "The Topography and Interpretation of the Lupercalia", *TAPhA* 84 (1953) 35–59; A. W. J. Holleman, *Pope Gelasius I and the Lupercalia*, Amsterdam 1974; C. Ulf, *Das römische Lupercalienfest*, Darmstadt 1982; W. Pötscher, "Die Lupercalia – eine Strukturanalyse", *GB* 11 (1984) 221–49; U. Bianchi, "Luperci", *DE* IV, parte III, 1985, 2204–12; T. P. Wiseman, "The god of the Lupercal", *JRS* 85 (1995) 1–22; A. Ziolkowski, "Ritual cleaning-up of the city: from the Lupercalia to the Argei", *AncSoc* 29 (1999) 191–218; P. Carafa, "Appendice III. I Lupercali", in A. Carandini (ed.), *La leggenda di Roma*, Roma 2006, 477–93.

⁶¹ E.g. Kirsopp Michels (above n. 60) 55; G. Binder, *Die Aussetzung des Königskindes. Kyros und Romulus* (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 10), Meisenheim an Glan 1964, 92–3; A. Peruzzi, *Civiltà greca nel Lazio preromano*, Firenze 1978, 33. On the other hand, Piccaluga (above n. 9, 222 n. 58) is not convinced of the analogous nature of the cults.

⁶² Suggested by H. Jordan, *Kritische Beiträge zur Geschichte der lateinischen Sprache*, Berlin

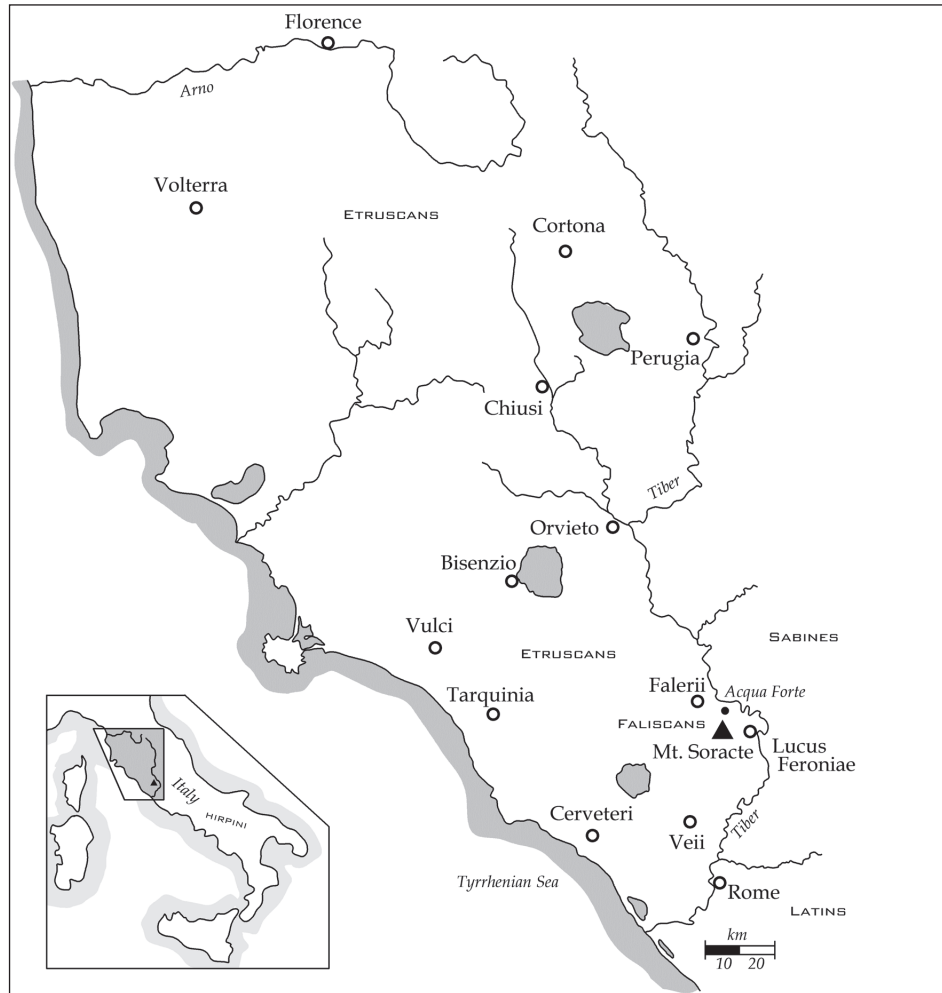


Fig. 3: Map of Tiber valley and Etruria. (Author's drawing)

from *lupo-sequos*, "wolf follower"⁶³ (compare the birth myth of the Hirpi Sorani cited above). Whichever the etymology is, it seems obvious that the Luperci were considered to be wolves,⁶⁴ like the priests of the Faliscan cult.

Like the Hirpi Sorani, the priests of the Lupercalia also belonged to certain families. They were divided into two collegia, the *Fabiani* and the *Quinctiliani*, named after the old Patrician families of *Fabii* and *Quintilii*.⁶⁵ In 46 BCE Julius

1879, 164.

⁶³ J. Gruber, "Zur Etymologie von lat. *lupercus*", *Glotta* 39 (1960/61) 273–6. Gruber, like Walde – Hofmann (above n. 23, 835, s.v. *lupercus*), rejects the theory of *lupercus* being a combination of *lupus* and *arcere* "ward off" and meaning "the protector from the wolves".

⁶⁴ Cf. Aug. *civ.* 18,17.

⁶⁵ *CIL* VI 1933; XI 3205; *Ov. fast.* 2,377–378; *Prop.* 4,1,26; *Fest. p.* 87M.

Caesar initiated a third collegium, the *Iulii*, which however was discontinued after his death in 43 BCE.⁶⁶

In the Lupercalia, the *Lupercal* cave acted as a passage to the Underworld. The Luperci came out of the cave at the beginning of their run and returned there at the end of it. Symbolically, the Luperci arrived from the Underworld and went back to their ancestors when the purification ritual was finished. It is worth noticing that a cave also appears in the birth legend of the Hirpi Sorani. In addition, on some Etruscan urns there is a wolf-like demon emerging from a well, which might also signify a passage to the world of the dead (see below, Figs. 5, 6).⁶⁷

Caves play an essential role in chthonic cults. While augurs and priests were able to be in touch with celestial gods through observation of auspices and sacrifices, a passage to the Underworld was needed in order to communicate with infernal powers. The priest could pass to the world of the dead either through a cave or a well – or, symbolically, through fire, as the Hirpi Sorani did.

A minor similarity in the birth myths of the Lupercalia and the Hirpi Sorani is the plundering of sacrificial flesh. At Mt. Soracte this was done by wolves. In Rome, Remus and his companions of the Fabius family had once eaten hissing entrails after a chase before Romulus and the Quintiliani arrived. Ovid relates the tale when describing the origins of the run of the Luperci.⁶⁸

* * *

Ancient suggestions of the Lupercalia being a continuation of the Arcadian cult of *Zeus Lykaios*⁶⁹ have been rejected nowadays.⁷⁰ The Lupercalia has been per-

⁶⁶ Cic. *Phil.* 13,5,31; Cass. Dio 44,6,2; Suet. *Iul.* 76, 1; Suet. *Aug.* 31.

⁶⁷ J. Heurgon, "Sur le culte de *Veltha*, le démon à tête de loup", *ArchClass* 43 (1991) 1255–6.

⁶⁸ Ov. *fast.* 2,372–376. The similarities between the plundering raids are discussed in more detail by L. Cerchiai, "Eracle, il lupo mannaro e una camicia rossa", *Ostraka* 7 (1998) 42.

⁶⁹ E.g. Dion. Hal. 1,32,3; Verg. *Aen.* 8,343; Liv. 1,5; Justin. 43,1. On the cult of *Zeus Lykaios* see W. Immerwahr, *Die Kulte und Mythen Arkadiens* I, Leipzig 1891, 1–24; R. P. Eckels, *Greek Wolf-lore*, Diss. Philadelphia 1937, 49–60.

⁷⁰ E.g. B. Riposati, "I 'Lupercali' in Varrone", in J. Collart (ed.), *Varron, grammaire antique et stylistique latine*, Paris 1978, 62–5.

ceived by modern scholars as a ritual of pastoral culture,⁷¹ initiation,⁷² fertility⁷³ or purification.⁷⁴ These different interpretations need not be mutually exclusive, because during the centuries the Lupercalia had changed and developed different connotations.

Among the literary sources there is little evidence to support the interpretation of the Lupercalia as a pastoral ritual.⁷⁵ There is some support for the initiation ritual, based mostly on comparative research of parallels found among other peoples and at different times, but many aspects of the Lupercalia are in fact contradictory to this interpretation.

In the first place, the Luperci were not teenagers but *iuvenes*, young men aged between 20 and 40. For example, Mark Antony was a Lupercus in 44 BCE at the age of 39 years.⁷⁶ Secondly, repeated participation in the ritual speaks against the interpretation as initiation.⁷⁷ Thirdly, the Lupercalia was held in the middle of the Parentalia, the festival celebrated in February in honour of the ancestors, not in March in connection with the Liberalia, when the coming of age of young men was celebrated.

During the Empire, the Lupercalia was widely recognized by the Romans as a fertility ritual.⁷⁸ According to Livy,⁷⁹ the fertility aspect was not dominant – if it existed at all – in the first phase of the cult but was an emphasis introduced by the senate in 276 BCE.⁸⁰ The Lupercalia seems always to have had a joyful

⁷¹ E.g. G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* II, München 1909, 210; Kirsopp Michels (above n. 60) 50–51.

⁷² E.g. Ulf (above n. 60); J. N. Bremmer, "Romulus, Remus and the Foundation of Rome", *Roman Myth and Mythography*, London 1987, 25–48; A. Frascchetti, *Romolo il fondatore*, Roma 2002.

⁷³ E.g. E. Mannhardt, *Mythologische Forschungen*, Straßburg 1884; G. Radke, "'Wolfsabwehrer' oder 'Wachstumsbitter'", *WJA* 15 (1989) 125–38; T. Köves-Zulauf, *Römische Geburtsriten* (Zetemata 87), München 1990, 224–45.

⁷⁴ E.g. Binder (above n. 61); A. W. J. Holleman, "Cicero on the Luperci", *AC* 44 (1975) 198–203; A. Mastrocinque, *Romolo (la fondazione di Roma tra storia e leggenda)*, Este 1993.

⁷⁵ Serv. *Aen.* 8,343 and, with an ambiguous interpretation, Cic. *Cael.* 26 and Val. Max. 2,2,9.

⁷⁶ Plut. *Caes.* 61; Cic. *Phil.* 13,15; Cass. Dio 44,6,2.

⁷⁷ E.g. *CIL* VI 495: *Caecilius ter Lupercus*.

⁷⁸ Plut. *Rom.* 21,7; *Caes.* 61,3; Ov. *fast.* 2,425; Gel. *adv. Andr.* 12.

⁷⁹ Liv. *fragm.* 14W–M; Gel. *adv. Andr.* 12. Cf. Oros. *hist.* 4,2,2; Aug. *civ.* 3,18.

⁸⁰ A. W. J. Holleman "Ovid and the Lupercalia", *Historia* 22 (1973) 262–4; Holleman (above n. 74) 202; U. W. Scholz, "Zur Erforschung der Römischen Opfer (Beispiel: die Lupercalia)",

nature,⁸¹ which was emphasized in the early Empire. The ritual developed more significantly into a light-hearted and amusing carnival, during which people, women especially,⁸² wanted to be struck with a goatskin strip by the Luperci in order to secure their fertility. However it must be noted that the Luperci struck bystanders of both sexes,⁸³ not only women, which casts doubt on the theory that this was explicitly a fertility ritual.

The theory that the Lupercalia was originally a purification ritual gets strong support from Varro⁸⁴ and Ovid.⁸⁵ In Roman mythology the world of the dead was associated not only with destructive but also with protective and purifying powers.⁸⁶ Faunus, the god to whom the celebration was most commonly dedicated, had chthonic connotations,⁸⁷ which agrees with the connection between the Lupercalia and the Parentalia. In the Lupercalia, the wolf-priests representing ancestors brought purification to the community from the Underworld.

* * *

in J.-P. Vernant (ed.), *Le sacrifice dans l'Antiquité* (Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 27), Genève 1980, 320. On the contrary, Köves-Zulauf (above n. 73) and J. A. North ("Caesar at the Lupercalia", *JRS* 98 [2008] 151–3) suggest that fertility was an important aspect of the Lupercalia from its origins.

⁸¹ Holleman (1973, above n. 80), 261; North (above n. 80) 152 and 160.

⁸² *Ov. fast.* 2,427; 2,445–446; *Iuv.* 2,142; *Serv. Aen.* 8,343; *Fest. p.* 57M; 85 M; *Gel. adv. Andr.* 16.

⁸³ *Plut. Caes.* 61; *Plut. Rom.* 21; *Plut. quest. Rom.* 280b; *Val. Max.* 2,2,9; *Ps. Vict. Aur. or.* 22,1.

⁸⁴ E.g. Varro *ling.* 6,34: *Posterior, ut idem dicunt scriptores, ab diis inferis Februarius appellatus, quod tum his parenteretur; ego magis arbitror Februarium a die februato, quod tum februatur populus, id est Lupercis nudis lustratur antiquum oppidum Palatium gregibus humanis cinctum.* "(- -) The latter, as the same writers say, was called *Februarius* 'February' from the *di inferi* 'gods of the Lower World', because at that time expiatory sacrifices are made to them; but I think that it was called February rather from the *dies februatus* 'Purification day', because then the people *februatur* 'is purified', that is, the old Palatine town girt with flocks of people is passed around by the naked Luperci." (translated by R. G. Kent).

The purifying aspect of the Lupercalia, which gives its name (*februa*) to the whole month, is mentioned by many authors of late Antiquity, too: *Fest. p.* 85M; *Cens.* 22,14; *Serv. georg.* 1,43; *Macr. Sat.* 1,13,3; *Lyd.* 4,25; *Isid.* 5,33,4.

⁸⁵ *Ov. fast.* 2,19–34; 5,101–102.

⁸⁶ See e.g. F. Pfister, "Katharsis", *RE* S VI (1935) 153.

⁸⁷ The Romans connected several gods with the Lupercalia, but most commonly the celebration was dedicated to Faunus, e.g. *Ov. fast.* 2,99–102, 267–268, 303–304, 423–424; *Ps. Vict. Aur. or.* 4,6; *Prob. Verg. georg.* 1,10. About the chthonic aspects of Faunus, see *Porf. Hor. carm.* 3,18; *Serv. Aen.* 7,91; W. F. Otto, "Faunus", *RE* VI, 2 (1909) 2064–66.

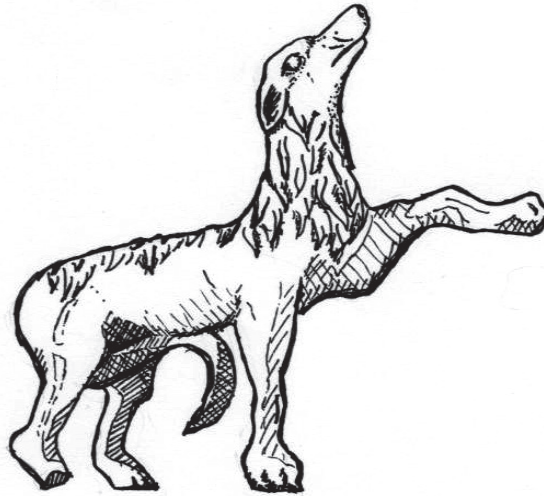


Fig. 4: Bronze statuette of the canine Etruscan god Calu with the inscription \acute{S} :CALU \acute{S} T \acute{L} A, from Cortona. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. (Author's drawing)

In the last decades a connection between the Hirpi Sorani and the Etruscan pantheon, especially with the aforementioned \acute{S} uri, has also been suggested.⁸⁸

The connection of wolves and the dead is obvious in the Etruscan pantheon. The Etruscan god of the Underworld, *Aita*, has often been depicted wearing a hood like a wolf's head, as can be seen in many paintings and sculptures and on coins.⁸⁹ The anthropomorphic *Aita* (or *Eita*) was a god of Greek origin (*Hades*) who in the 4th century BCE replaced the indigenous Etruscan Underworld god *Calu*.⁹⁰ The wolf-headed appearance of *Aita* might derive from the zoomorphic *Calu*, who appeared in the form of a canine (Fig. 4) – probably, because of its mane, to be interpreted as a wolf.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Colonna (above n. 32) 72–7; (above n. 50) 572; (1987, above n. 46) 433; Di Stefano Manzella (above n. 28) 159–67; Comella (above n. 51) 301–316; Colonna (2007, above n. 52) 106 and 113.

⁸⁹ See e.g. G. Q. Giglioli, *L'arte Etrusca*. Milano 1935, 65, tav. 348; G. Dennis (above n. 43) 58–9; M. P. Baglione, "Su alcune serie parallele di bronzo coniato", *Contributi introduttivi allo studio della monetazione etrusca. Atti del 5° Convegno CISN (Napoli, 1975)* (Annali [Istituto Italiano di Numismatica], Suppl. 22), Roma 1976, 153–4; I. Krauskopf, *Todesdämonen und Totengötter im vorhellenistischen Etrurien. Kontinuität und Wandel* (Studi Etruschi 16), Firenze 1987, 61–7; I. Krauskopf, "Hades / Aita, Calu", in *LIMC IV*, Zürich 1988, 394–9.

⁹⁰ P. Defosse, "Génie funéraire ravisseur (Calu) sur quelques urnes Étrusques", *AC* 41 (1972) 498–9.

⁹¹ Defosse (above n. 90) identifies the canine of the statuette as a wolf. W. L. Rupp Jr. (*Shape of the Beast: The Theriomorphic and Therianthropic Deities and Demons of Ancient Italy*, Diss. Tallahassee 2007, 50 and 129) proposes either wolf or wolf-hound. On the contrary, E.

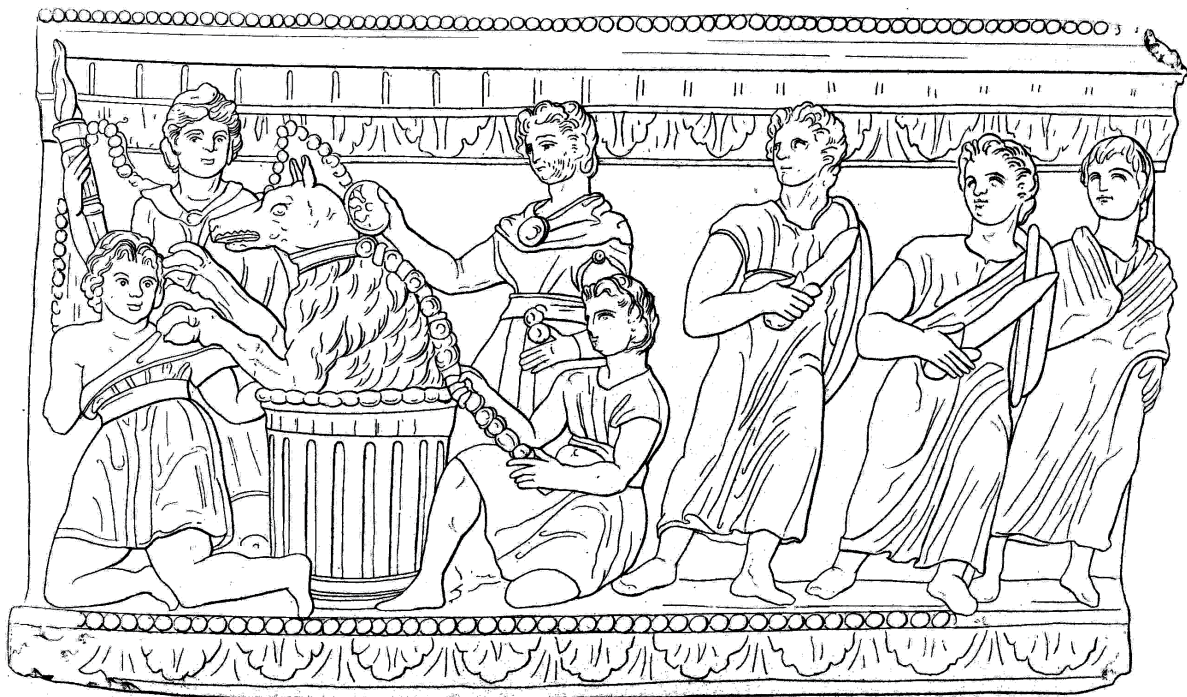


Fig. 5: Alabaster urn of Chiusian origin, width 67 cm. Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. n. 5781. (From Körte [below n. 95])

Some interrelation between Etruscan and Roman religious practices can be expected. It has in fact been suggested by some scholars that the phonetically un-Latin *p* in the word *lupus* is due to Etruscan influence (Etr. *lupu*, "death").⁹²

Among Etruscan artifacts, seven urns⁹³ dating from the 3rd or 2nd century BCE are decorated with reliefs representing a chained wolf emerging from a

Richardson ("The Wolf in the West", *The Journal of Walters Art Gallery* 35 [1977] 95) regards the animal more as a hound than a wolf, and Krauskopf (1988, above n. 89, 394) as a hound.

⁹² C. Marchetti Longhi, "Il Lupercale nel suo significato religioso e topografico", *Capitolium* 9 (1933) 370; A. Alföldi, *The Etruscans*, 1978, 218–9; A. W. J. Holleman, "Lupus, Lupercalia, lupa", *Latomus* 45 (1985) 609–14. However, generally the un-Latinity of the word *lupus* is explained by Sabine influence, cf. Walde – Hofmann (above n. 23) 836–7, s.v. *lupus*.

⁹³ Urns of Volterranean origin, made of alabaster: 1) Volterra, Museo Guarnacci, inv. n. 350; 2) Volterra, Museo Guarnacci, inv. n. 351; 3) Camposanto di Pisa (fragmented). An urn of Chiusian origin, made of alabaster: 4) Florence, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. n. 5781. Urns of Perugian origin, made of travertine: 5) Perugia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Umbria, inv. 341; 6) Museo Civico di Chiusi, inv. n. 955 (disappeared); made of terracotta: 7) Perugia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Umbria, inv. 323. Besides, the same scene is represented in a terracotta plaque (Museo Comunale di Gubbio, inv. n. 309) which however is probably a modern copy of the terracotta urn of Perugia (number 7). Cf. M. Matteini Chiari (ed.), *Museo Comunale di Gubbio. Materiali archeologici*, Gubbio 1995, 417–8, n. 623; M. Sclafani, *Urne fittili chiusine e perugine di età medio e tardo ellenistica*, Roma 2010, 105–6.



Fig. 6: Travertine urn of Perugian origin, width 58 cm. Perugia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Umbria, inv. 341. (From Körte [below n. 95])

well. In addition to the wolf, most of the urn scenes also depict *Vanth*, a winged female demon from the Underworld carrying a torch, and a man with a *patera*, a plate for liquid offerings, as well as some armed men. The chthonic nature of the scene is obvious. In Etruscan art, *Vanth* is commonly depicted as a psychopomp, a guide to the Underworld.⁹⁴ The chthonic nature is confirmed by the well, which symbolizes a passage to the Underworld, and the wolf, an animal connected with death. Furthermore, the man with a *patera* indicates that the scene includes a sacrifice.

It is uncertain, however, whether the reliefs represent a mythological scene or a ritual. G. Körte's hypothesis connects the scene with a story told by Pliny the Elder about a monster called *Olta* or *Volta*, against whom a thunderbolt was invoked by sacred rites.⁹⁵ The name of the monster is associated with the Etruscan

⁹⁴ See e.g. C. Weber-Lehmann, "Vanth", *LIMC VIII*, Zürich 1986, 173–83.

⁹⁵ G. Körte, *I rilievi delle urne etrusche III*, Berlin 1916, 16–23. Plin. *nat.* 2,140: *Exstat annalium memoria sacris quibusdam et precationibus vel cogi fulmina vel impetrari. Vetus fama Etruriae est, impetratum Volsinios urbem depopulatis agris subeunte monstro, quod vocavere oltam, evocatum a Porsina suo rege.* "It is related in our Annals, that by certain sacred rites and imprecations, lightnings may be compelled or invoked. There is an old report in Etruria, that a lightning was invoked when the city of Volsinium had its territory laid waste by a monster named *Olta*. A lightning was also invoked by King Porsenna." (transl. H. Rackham).



Fig. 7: Lid of bronze vase (730–700 BCE), from Bisenzio. Rome, Museo Etrusco di Villa Giulia, inv. n. 57066. (Author's photograph)

word *veltha*, meaning both "earth" and a demon with chthonic powers.⁹⁶ Even though Körte himself was not fully convinced of the connection, his theory has been widely quoted.⁹⁷ In my opinion, the connection between Pliny's story and the urns described above is very unlikely. Pliny mentions a monster, *monstrum*, not a wolf, and a thunderbolt, which does not appear on any of the urns.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ D. Anziani, "Démonologique Étrusque", *MEFRA* 30 (1910) 267. In *Liber Linteus*, an Etruscan text found in mummy wrappings, the word *veltha* appears five times, always referring rather to demons than the earth. S. P. Cortsen, "Literaturbericht 1928–1934: Etruskisch", *Glotta* 23 (1935) 145–87. A. Pfiffig (*Religio Etrusca*, Graz 1975, 314–5) remarks that, similarly, the Greek word γαῖα means both "earth" and the Earth goddess *Gaia*.

⁹⁷ Pfiffig (above n. 96); J. Heurgon (above n. 67) 1253–9; J. Elliott, "The Etruscan Wolfman in Myth and Ritual", *EtrStud* 2 (1995) 17–33.

⁹⁸ The connection of the urns and Pliny's story is strongly rejected by P. Defosse ("À propos du monster à tête de loup représenté sur quelques urnes étrusques", *Latomus* 53 [1994] 410) and



Fig. 8: Amphora from Cerveteri (6th century BCE). Paris, Musée du Louvre, Neg.E72.3. (From Elliott 1995 [above n. 97])

Fig. 9: Plate from Vulci, Necropoli dell'Osteria, Tomba 177 (540–510 BCE). Rome, Museo Etrusco di Villa Giulia, inv. n. 844. (Author's photograph)

It has also been suggested that the urn reliefs represent scenes from Greek mythology,⁹⁹ the wolf-shaped Etruscan god Calu,¹⁰⁰ or the Roman king Numa chaining the god Faunus, a scene connected with a story told by Ovid.¹⁰¹

Among the Greeks, no parallels for the wolf figure can be found, which suggests an Italic origin for the scene. As for the Roman literary sources, Pliny and Ovid, should we even try to find an interpretation for the 3rd and 2nd century BCE urn scenes from stories that were written down centuries later? The stories about Olta or Numa could rather be seen as literary reminiscences of rituals or myths represented in the ash urns.

N. T. de Grummond (*Etruscan Myth, Sacred History and Legend*, Philadelphia 2006, 14), too.

⁹⁹ E.g. necromancy performed by Odysseus, suggested by P. Ducati ("Esegesi di Alcune Urne Etrusche", *RAL* 19 [1910] 166–8) or *Thanatos* chained by Sisyphus, suggested by E. Simon ("Sentiment religieux et vision de la mort chez les Étrusques dans les derniers siècles de leur histoire", in F. Gaultier – D. Briquel [eds.], *Les Étrusques, Les plus religieux des hommes: état de la recherche sur la religion étrusque. Actes du colloque international Grand Palais 17-19.II.1992*, Paris 1997, 454).

¹⁰⁰ Defosse (above n. 90) 487–99.

¹⁰¹ Rupp (above n. 91) 67–76. *Ov. fast.* 3,291–326.

On the urns from Volterra and Chiusi (Fig. 5), the figure emerging from the well is depicted realistically as a wolf. On the urns of Perugian provenance (Fig. 6), the figure is rather a man disguised as a wolf. P. Defosse explains this distinction with the different dating of the urns: those from Perugia, being later, could have had an anthropomorphic wolf influenced by the Hellenization of Etruscan mythology.¹⁰² However, we do not know the exact dating of any of these reliefs.

The lid of an 8th century BCE Villanovan bronze vase (Fig. 7) presents an interesting parallel to the urns with wolf figures. The ritual scene represented on the lid has some similarities with later urns (a chained beast, armed men and possibly a well under the beast), even though the chained monster is an imaginary beast rather than a wolf.

In addition to the urn reliefs, other examples of a therianthrope wolf figure or a man wearing a wolf skin can be found among Etruscan artifacts. On a 6th-century BCE amphora (Fig. 8) and a 6th-century BCE plate (Fig. 9) a wolf-headed and fur-covered figure is depicted whose body is human-shaped. In both of the paintings the figure is in motion, either dancing or running. It could be interpreted either as a wolf demon or a man disguised as a wolf.¹⁰³ However, as the wolf figure is the only common element in these paintings and the ash urns, we cannot be sure whether they belong to the same cultural tradition.

On the basis of the archeological evidence discussed above, we can conclude that the Etruscans shared a cultural phenomenon characterized by wolves that emerged from the Underworld. It is not sure whether the reliefs depict a ritual, as suggested by J. Elliott,¹⁰⁴ or a mythological scene.

* * *

When the Hirpi Sorani went across the glowing embers and ashes, they symbolically passed to the world of the dead. As the wolf was considered a sacred animal devoted to the powers of death, the priests representing wolves (as well as ancestors) had access to the Underworld while performing the ritual.

¹⁰² Defosse (above n. 90) 493 and 499. F. Messerschmidt ("Das Grab der Volumnier bei Perugia", *MDAIR* 57 [1942] 204–5), on the other hand, suggests that the Volterran urns are later than the others.

¹⁰³ J.-R. Jannot, "Phersu, Phersuna, Persona", in *Spectacles sportifs et scéniques dans le monde étrusco-italique: actes de la table ronde organisée par l'Équipe de recherches étrusco-italiques de l'UMR 126 (CNRS, Paris) et l'École française de Rome, Rome, 3–4 mai 1991* (Coll. EFR 172), Rome 1993, 284–6.

¹⁰⁴ Elliott (above n. 97) 31.

I believe that the cult of the Hirpi Sorani had common origins with the Roman Lupercalia. In these cults the observance of the ritual was different, but the basic idea was identical: the wolf-priests purified their people by means of chthonic powers.

The interpretation of the Etruscan artifacts discussed above is far more ambiguous, but it is clear to me that the pictorial motif of a wolf figure (a god or a demon) emerging from a well (seen as a passage to the world of the dead) is not an isolated phenomenon but should be examined in the same context as the wolf cults of the Faliscans and the Romans.

Even though in some Greek cities, such as Delphi, the wolf was an honoured animal associated with the gods¹⁰⁵ and its chthonic nature was acknowledged all over the ancient world, nowhere else were these aspects as prominent as in central Italy. It seems plausible that the wolf was a sacred animal for the peoples of this region in the prehistoric era. From this background, possibly dating back to the 6th century BCE cultural *koine* of the Tiber valley, the different manifestations of the special religious position of the wolf have emerged, the cult of the Hirpi Sorani being one of its manifestations.¹⁰⁶

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¹⁰⁵ See, e.g., Eckels (above n. 69); C. Mainoldi, *L'image du loup et du chien dans la Grèce ancienne, d'Homère à Platon*, Paris 1984.

¹⁰⁶ I would like to thank Anne Helttula and Raija Vainio for their valuable comments and Eleanor Underwood for revising and correcting my English.