Art History/Summer

Description of Research

By the end of the fifteenth century, a conscious Etruscan revival was underway in Renaissance Florence. Spearheaded by Medici patronage, archaeological excavations and etymological study sought to uncover the glory of the Etruscan civilization while simultaneously linking it to contemporary Florence (Weil-Garris Posner, 649). Etruscan style and motif became increasingly prominent in art sponsored by the Medici family as they alluded to the grandeur Florence could inherit while under the firm guidance of the Medici. By the time of Cosimo the Elder (1389-1464), who cemented the Medici family’s control of Florence, excavations of Etruscan sites were already underway. His son, Lorenzo de’ Medici (1449-1492), readily embraced Etruscan art and collected important archaeological finds including several Are- tine vases (Schoonhoven, 462). Despite the family’s desire for Etruscan artifacts, they were not concerned with historical accuracy. They adopted a myth fabricated by the historian Annio da Viterbo (1432-1502) which suggested that the Etruscans, who predated the Romans and even the Greeks, were the ancestors of Noah. Noah had adopted the name Janus and spread the culture of his people in Italy after being displaced by the great flood. Although the scholarship behind these writings was doubted even in his time, Viterbo’s legend continued to be popular under the reign of Grand Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici (1537-1572) (Schoonhoven, 463). Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Medici sponsored art displayed distinctly Etruscan influence as a result of this focus on Tuscany’s Etruscan past.

The effects of the Renaissance “Etruscan myth” can especially be seen in Michelangelo’s statuary in The Medici chapel at the Basilica San Lorenzo and in Pontormo’s fresco of Vertumnus and Pomona at Poggio a Caiano. Having lived in the Medici household for a period of five years, Michelangelo would have become particularly close to his patrons and would have known how best to flatter them (Paoletti, 437). In Renaissance Tuscany, this meant suggesting an Etruscan heritage. Michelangelo suggested Medici connections with the Etruscans by employing Etruscan iconographic motifs throughout the Medici chapel. His sculpture of Night and Morning display Etruscan influence in their dress and movement and closely resemble reclining statuary found in Etruscan tombs. For example, the central figure on the Etruscan sarcophagus of Aruns Volumnius gives a hand gesture which closely resembles that of Night and the seated Dukes in San Lorenzo resemble the two Lasces which guard the effigy (Weil-Garris Posner, 649). It is doubtful this is coincidence, as we know Michelangelo was acquainted with Etruscan urns and sarcophagi and examined Etruscan tomb paintings (Rediscovery, 30). Michelangelo’s innovative architectural techniques also reflect Etruscan influence due to his devoted study of Vitruvius, who wrote about Etruscan forms as a variation on the Doric (Elam, 70).

Pontormo’s fresco at Poggio a Caiano exemplifies the Medici focus on Etruscan motifs. It depicts the legend of Vertumnus and Pomona, a story that appears in Ovid’s Metamorphosis which features a uniquely Etruscan god. The Roman scholar Varro, widely read at the time of the Renaissance, listed Vertumnus as the principal god of Etruria. Roman scholars assert that the sanctuary to Vertumnus was the most important religious center for the Etruscans and was the meeting point for the twelve Etruscan city states (Etruscan myth, 64). It is likely that Vertumnus, a fertility deity whose name lived on through the poetry of Ovid, had a particular appeal to Lorenzo de’ Medici, who often compared himself to classical deities including Apollo and Pan.
A poet himself, Lorenzo de’ Medici was an avid reader of Ovid and would have been familiar with *Metamorphosis*. Vertumnus would have been an appropriate Etruscan deity for Lorenzo to identify with since fertility and the regeneration of spring were often used as a metaphor by the Medici to suggest the rebirth of a Florentine golden age under their patronage (Cox-Rearick, 169, 180, 184, 196). Vertumnus is also identified with Apollo by Propertius, a Roman poet, who states that Vertumnus has the ability to transform into any form, including that of another god (*Etruscan Myth*, 69). While the fresco was not commissioned by Lorenzo de’ Medici himself, it was commissioned by his son, Giovanni, later Pope Leo X (1475-1521). This would have been a fitting homage to Giovanni’s father. Indeed, the increasing popularity of Annio da Viterbo’s *Antiquitates* which featured the assertions that the Etruscan people were descendants of Noah would have undoubtedly inspired a desire to associate Lorenzo and the Medici family with a more Etruscan deity. Interestingly, Viterbo asserts that Janus, Noah’s adopted name, was translated to “Vertumno” in Etruscan (Schoonhoven, 463).

The artworks found in the Medici chapel at San Lorenzo and in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s villa at Poggio a Caiano show us how the use of Etruscan forms and subject matter served to elevate Medici importance during the Renaissance. They are also prime examples of how the powerful will often use the art of the past as propaganda to associate themselves with a perceived golden age. It is crucial that I am able to travel to Tuscany for my research so that I can make an iconographical and thematic comparison of these two monuments which, in combination with an examination of ancient and renaissance textual evidence, will allow me to understand the Medici appropriation of the Etruscans. As part of my research, I would conduct field work on weekdays at the ancient Etruscan site of Cetamura del Chianti from May 16th to June 17th, leaving weekends to travel to Florence and Poggio a Caiano to study the monuments in question and visit the Museo Archeologico in Florence. The Museo Archeologico houses one of the most comprehensive collections of Etruscan artifacts in Italy and will certainly provide a greater familiarity with Etruscan artistic conventions. Dr. Laurel Taylor, under whom I will be studying at Cetamura del Chianti, feels that my studies at the archaeological field school this summer will enable me to accurately report on the Medici use of Etruscan themes. By examining conventions drawn from Etruscan artifacts in these artworks, I will draw conclusions about the development of the “Etruscan myth” of Renaissance Tuscany and its application by the Medici.

**Budget:**

As part of the program fee for my involvement in the UNCA sponsored archaeological dig I will be staying in Cetamura del Chianti with room and board already provided. Because the fee for the program costs more than the maximum allotted amount for grants, I will be asking primarily for funding toward transportation and expenses for travel to Florence and Poggio a Caiano. Any remaining funding received will be put toward the archaeological program cost of $3050. I have also applied for funding from the American Institute of Archaeology which provides $1000 to successful applicants. Due to the unpredictable nature of exchange rates between the euro and the dollar and because I cannot yet predict the exact cost of food and lodging while away from Cetamura del Chianti, these numbers are approximate estimates. The following estimates have been converted from euros to dollars based on the current exchange rate.
Transportation $1040.72

This estimate includes my plane ticket ($950.29) as well as train travel from Radda (the closest town to Cetamura del Chianti with a bus system) to Florence for two weekends ($80). This also includes the price of travel to Poggio a Caiano from Florence ($10.46).

Meals while at Florence/Poggio a Caiano $150

This is of course a speculative price because I will not know how expensive meals will be while staying in Florence and Poggio a Caiano. Because I will be staying in hostels, I will most likely not have the option of preparing my own meals and so will have to rely on eating in restaurants for the weekend.

Lodging $140

I will be staying in hostels while in Florence. Although I will attempt to travel with others, this is not guaranteed and so I am budgeting as though I would be paying for the entirety of the room. Although the exact hostel I will be staying in has not been decided, based on the research I have done it seems that the average hostel in Florence would cost around $35 a night.

Program Fees $1169.28

I am requesting that the remaining grant allotment not put toward transportation, meals and lodging expenses go toward paying part of the $3050 UNCA archaeology program fee that has made my stay in Italy and further investigation of the Etruscans possible.

**Timeline and Presentations**

I will be traveling to Italy from May 13th to June 19th, during which time I will spend weekdays excavating at the Etruscan archaeological site of Cetamura del Chianti and at least two weekends traveling to Florence and Poggio a Caiano to examine the Medici Chapel and the art in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s villa. After returning to North Carolina, I will conduct further research on the subject and apply it to conclusions I have drawn. I will submit my completed research to Laurel Taylor by August 1st. I intend to present my findings at the UNCA Undergraduate Symposium for Undergraduate Research in the fall and submit my research to NCUR and the Southern Art Association. I also plan to submit to the regional meeting of the Classical Association of the Midwest and South. In addition to these presentations, I hope to publish my findings in the UNCA Journal of Undergraduate research and would ideally like to submit research to other scholarly journals that would be appropriate for my studies such as *Renaissance Quarterly*, *Renaissance Studies* and *Classical Journal*.

**Works Consulted**


Cox-Rearick, Janet. “Themes of Time and Rule at Poggio a Caiano: The Portico Frieze of


