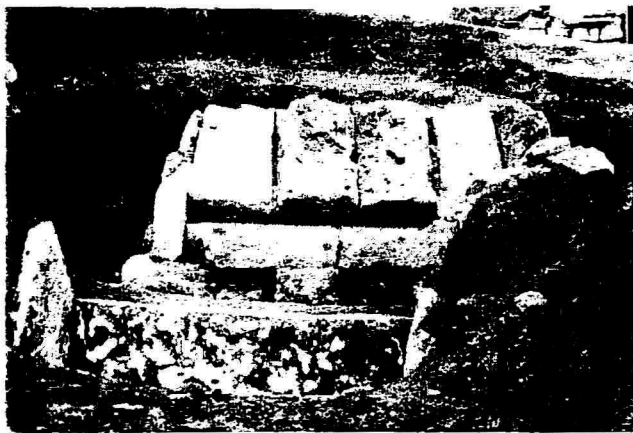




The chamber tomb recently found at Paestum. side view.



The arch-shaped entrance of the chamber tomb.

A NEW PAINTED TOMB AT PAESTUM

By PELLEGRINO CLAUDIO SESTIERI

Superintendent of Antiquities, Salerno

ON THE NINTH OF SEPTEMBER, 1943, American troops made their historic landing at Salerno. They established a beachhead and their engineers turned immediately to the vital task of constructing airbases. As luck would have it, one of the sites chosen was a farm at Gaudio, a little over a half-mile north of Paestum. The bulldozers went to work—and within a matter of days their blades ripped into the remains of an ancient cemetery.

It was not until a year and a half later that archaeologists were able to get at the site. Even then, in the spring of 1945, they had to work amid the constant roar of fighter planes taking off for their

grim missions from the airstrip nearby. What they found was worth the effort—the burial ground of a people who, in the third millennium B.C., had migrated from their homes in Asia Minor and settled on the rich fields about Paestum. In the graves, which had been hewn with flint tools in the underlying soft limestone, were found skeletons in contracted position, large pottery vessels, and beautifully made flint daggers and arrowheads. All these were evidence of a culture unique in Italy of this period, which is now known as the Gaudio culture.

Then recently came an exciting new find: a splendid Lucanian tomb datable to the fourth century B.C., in



Fresco painting on the south wall of the tomb: two gladiators ready for the fray.

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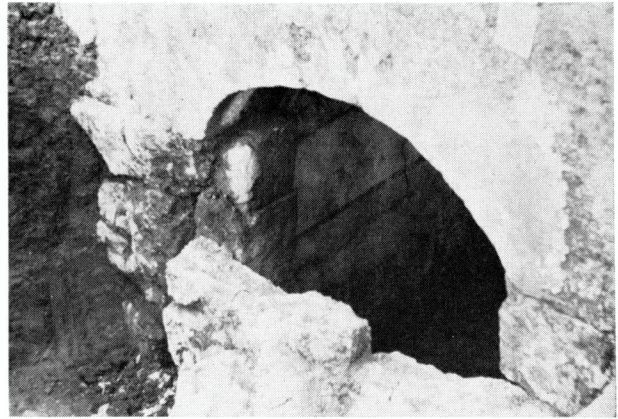


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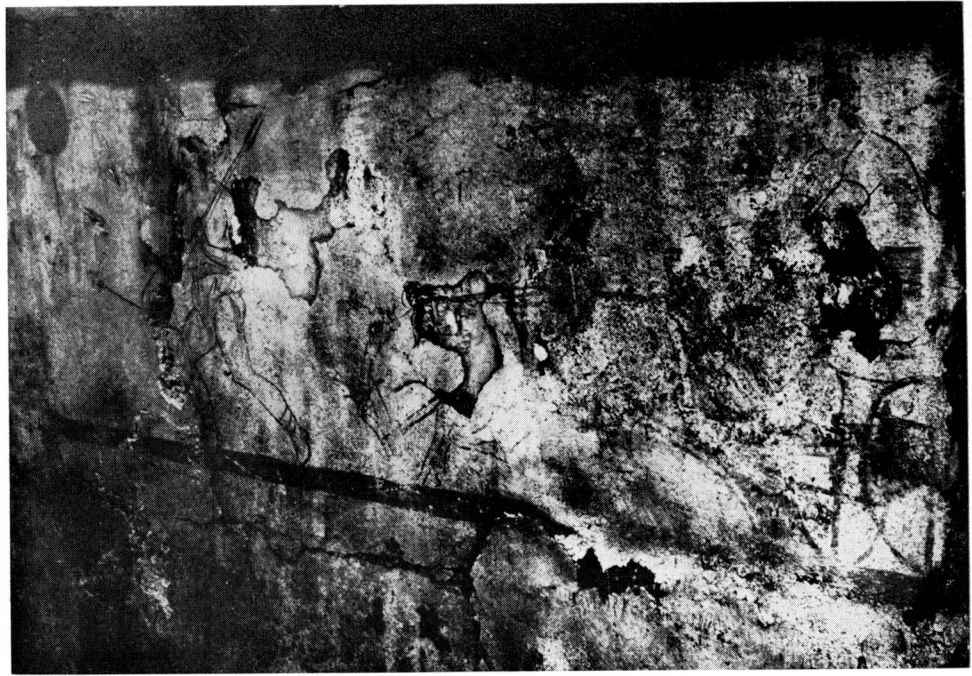
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Fresco painting on the south wall of the tomb: two gladiators ready for the fray.



Fresco painting on the north wall of the tomb. The deceased riding his chariot to the underworld, preceded by a warrior with two spears.

Right: Drawing of the fresco on the north wall.

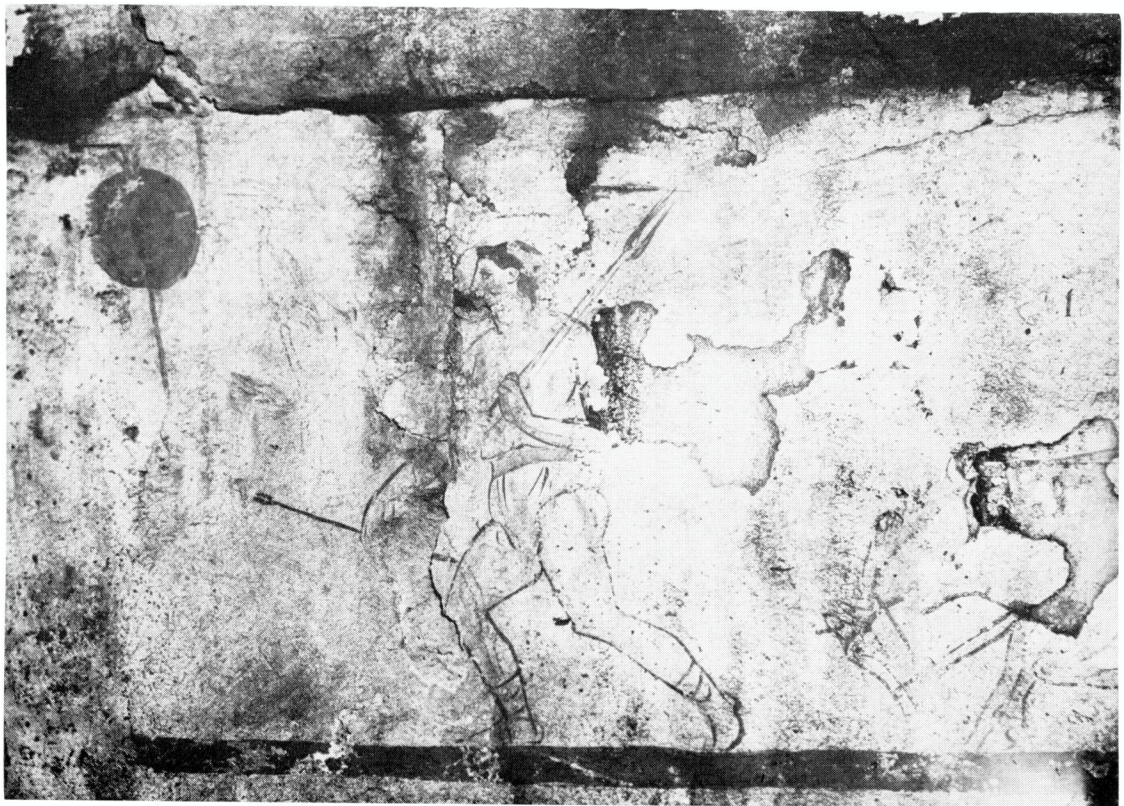
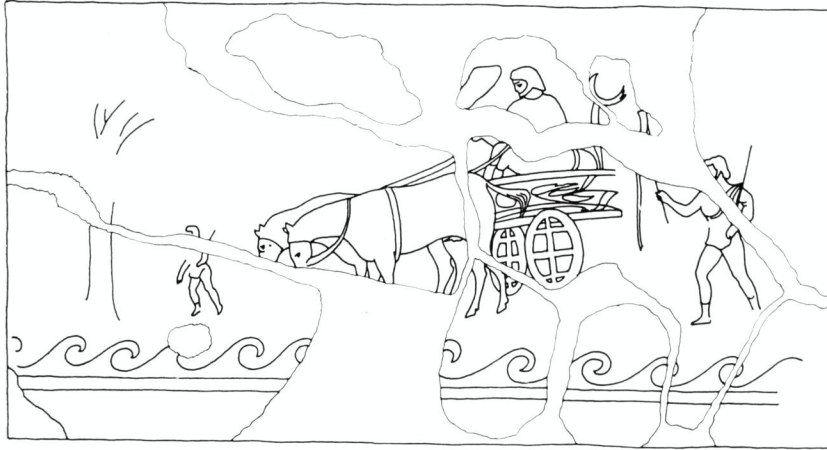
practically perfect condition. Again it was a modern machine that was responsible. When the war ended, the airbase was abandoned and the land it once covered returned to the farmers. Their tractors, now turning the soil in the interests of peace, not war, broke into a large hole. Scientific excavation followed. The result was the uncovering of one of the most sumptuous and grandiose South Italian tombs yet known. It recalled a number of rich Lucanian tombs which were discovered early in the nineteenth century. Their description survives in *Antichità Pestane* (1819), by Canon Bamonte. Unfortunately, after the contents had been removed, the tombs themselves were left to the depredations of the peasants and the mercies of the weather.

IN SHAPE AND CONSTRUCTION the newly found tomb is unique. Most of the other tombs of this period that have been discovered in the area are simple affairs, limestone slabs set up to form a sort of chest. This is a real chamber tomb, a structure of square blocks forming a rectangular room about nine feet long and six and three-quarters wide. Its roof is of large flat slabs set into grooves in the side walls and meeting to form a gable. The east end was closed by two large slabs set upright. When these were removed an entrance made in a most interesting shape was re-

vealed. It consists of two small piers, one on either side, topped by a large lintel out of which a semi-circular piece had been cut to give it the shape of an arch. Although this is not a true arch, it is nevertheless of the greatest importance and interest, since the tomb dates from the early fourth century B.C.

Three of the interior walls of the tomb had been painted in fresco. The technique used was the same as that found elsewhere in Paestum: on a white ground figures were outlined in black, and details added in yellow or red. Though the subjects are the same as those in other tombs at Paestum, they are executed with greater simplicity and taste, and the backgrounds contain only a few pomegranates, symbols of resurrection, instead of the usual crowded *mélange* of motifs. The painting on the south wall is the best preserved—two gladiators preparing to lock in combat. Only half of what was originally painted on the west wall is left. The hind part of a horse is shown; judging by examples found in other tombs, the complete scene very likely showed a cavalryman returning victorious from battle. The space available makes it likely that he was shown alone and not accompanied by trophy-bearers or greeted by a wife, as elsewhere. On the north wall is a scene frequently found in the Paestan tombs, the deceased on his way to the underworld. He rides a chariot drawn by two horses—mules are

PAESTUM continued

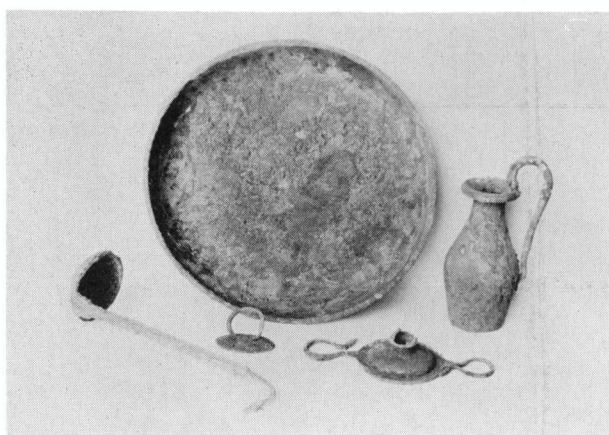


Detail from the same painting on the north wall, showing the horses with lowered heads, the warrior in front, leading them, and above, at left, a pomegranate.

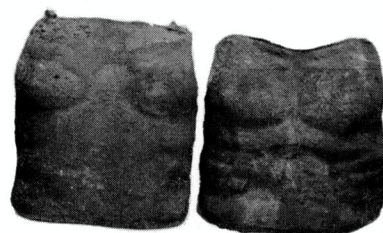
PAESTUM continued



Lekythos with a scene from Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. Orestes sits on an altar surrounded by trees. His mantle covers only his back; in his right hand is a sword; his left holds the sheath. Apollo stands before him with a laurel branch over his left shoulder and a piglet (for sacrifice) in his right hand. Behind the god is Latona, wearing peplos, mantle and crown. The name of each figure is inscribed in Greek letters. Height 18½ inches.



Bronze vases and implements found in the tomb: a large basin, a ladle, strainer (in two parts) and jug.



Bronze armor found in the tomb—helmet, breast and back plates, greaves.

Kylix with polychrome figures. A woman sits on a yellow throne. Her flesh is painted white and she wears a black himation. Behind her is a female figure, perhaps Peitho, and before her is Eros. Very likely the wife of the deceased—identified with Aphrodite—is represented here in idealized form, as she prepares for her marriage to Hades, god of the underworld. Diameter 10½ inches. *Right*: Plate with painted fishes and marine creatures.



sometimes shown elsewhere—whose heads droop low as they make the sorrowful and arduous journey. A man carrying two spears leads them—a comrade-in-arms perhaps, accompanying his friend or his chief on this somber last march. Perhaps, as in other tombs, the original scene included behind the figures a demon with a whip, the divinity whose task it is to drive the dead from their homes. Above the three scenes runs a cornice in relief bearing a painted laurel branch; under them is a socle painted in red.

THE BODY of the deceased had been laid out on the earth floor, head toward the east. Near his feet had been placed his bronze armor: breastplate and backplate, each fitted to the torso, greaves for protecting the legs, and a helmet of Italic type with two sockets to hold the plumes. Nearby were his weapons, a sword and spear, both of iron, and also a candelabrum and a whip. The utensils found in the tomb were of both bronze and clay. The bronzes include a small jug (much like those found in fifth-century tombs at Vulci), a circular basin, ladle and strainer, the latter two similar to fifth-century types found in Etruscan tombs. The ceramic objects include a number of cups,

an undecorated amphora and three important painted vases with well executed and highly interesting scenes. One particularly notable vase is a large lekythos bearing scenes from Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. The painting is probably the work of Asteas, Paestum's greatest vase painter in the fourth century B.C. The second vessel is a large, two-handled cup (kylix) with polychrome figures. The central figure, a seated woman, probably represents the warrior's wife, who is identified with the goddess Aphrodite and at the same time imagined as the bride of Hades. This vase is also attributed to the painter Asteas. The third vessel is a plate charmingly decorated with fishes, a squid and other sea creatures. Although of Paestan origin, it shows Campanian influence.

The bronzes and the paintings on the walls of the tomb are to be dated in the early years of the fourth century B.C., while the vase paintings appear to date from ca. 340. This slight discrepancy in date, as well as the fact that the weapons and armor were found at the west end of the tomb, leads us to believe that the warrior was interred first, early in the century, and the tomb was later re-opened and the offerings adjusted to make room for his wife.

The wall paintings, although Lucanian in subject-matter, are Greek in technique and style, and certainly were done by a Greek painter. The *Eumenides* lekythos records the work of an Athenian dramatist. We can see that although Paestum had been conquered by the Lucanians, its character and sentiments remained always Greek.