

Cornelius van Linjpleel's Contributions to the Study of Etruscan Tombs

by strannikov

“Hidden earth, dry or damp, has that smell, ready to turn to fecundity everything that drops into it, everything that falls into it, everything buried in it, everything that burrows into it.” (18 August 1898 entry from the private journal of Cornelius van Linjpleel)

Cornelius van Linjpleel discovered and excavated for himself a lone Etruscan tomb not far from Populonia in 1898. The tomb having maintained its structural integrity for centuries and millennia, Cornelius soon set up house there. He had begun sleeping in the tomb even during its excavation, a canvas cot its first furnishing in quite a spell. Living in the tomb was not itself spooky, but from his first night there, Cornelius had vivid, startling dreams.

His first dreams were always lit in the light of late afternoon, spots of direct light breaking through branches of embanked trees. He found himself always standing on the western bank of some river. Or was it always? No, he was definitely in Memphis once. Tennessee. He'd gotten good and lost, and somewhere north or south of the city, he'd almost been hit by a truck. It had its lights on, but it was swerving madly on a road directly adjacent to the churning Mississipp. It sped narrowly by with a huge rattle in the back, heavy metal implements shimmying and clanging against the bed. Only as it passed did Cornelius see that no silhouette of a driver was framed in the receding headlights. Only after it passed did he realize that along with a dozen muddy shovels, the truck carried a muddy coffin. But it was the truck's deafening clatter and rattle that shook him by head and ears, not all the water in the passing Mississippi River could drown the memory, could

carry off or wash away that horrid loud rattle. The Arno, when not at flood stage, was another matter: even the Chiana had a calming effect. And so, somewhere on the high ground between an accursed ditch and a miserable brook, a sunset was beheld: and almost of itself, this sunset composed the answer to a question or somehow seemed to settle matters.

Another time, Cornelius lapsed into a fitful dream in which he was receiving direct telepathic communications from some asteroid previously deemed uninhabited: "SEND LOTTERY JACKPOT ASAP".

"Why do I get to do everything?" Cornelius muttered as he stood in line to buy a \$20 million (USD) winning ticket. After collecting his winnings, he spent \$8 million bribing a NASA engineer for a payload spot on a Mars orbiter launch. Keeping \$2 million for costs, et cetera, he put the remaining \$10 million in an unobtrusive canvas flour sack and sent it as directed.

Still within that dream, Cornelius next kinda sorta woke up, knowing instantly that he was in a tunnel somewhere beneath Etruria. Being underground, his telepathic powers operated sub-optimally, so he had to guess he was near Orvieto. A good guess: he was near Orvieto, but no closer than Sovana and about twenty-five meters deeper than he might otherwise have dreamed or guessed. Cornelius rubbed the back of his head gently, his brain felt as stiff there as a sun-dried sponge. His brain also felt as if it were being cradled in a colander, with his spinal cord being stretched tightly through the small perforations. His medulla oblongata felt particularly elongated and tense, while twinges and spasms raged through his extremities. Gently, he lowered himself into an available sandstone cradle, with a carved headrest cool to the touch, amazingly comfortable after all these centuries! In his dream Cornelius was soon asleep and dreaming . . .

Meanwhile, in his otherwise comfy tomb, Cornelius was waking to a lightly leaking roof. "I'm so happy, I could sleep!" he thought dazily, until the trickle down his neck made him move his cot. He made fresh calculations so he'd know where to place one of

his two remaining tiles, once the drizzle ended. He had left them leaning against the doorway, concave side out, for rapid deployment at the first break in any rainfall. Then, instead of returning to his cot, Cornelius sat on his short bench smiling at the morning: on the prevailing breezes, yes, the wisteria arbors he'd installed the year prior were just the right distance off.

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