

# Death Driving Deposition: Funerary Practice as a Motivator of Tarquinian Selection in the Attic Vase Trade<sup>1</sup>

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For much of the twentieth century the *communis opinio* regarding the diffusion of Attic pottery operated on the assumption that non-Athenian consumers bought whatever was available without discrimination.<sup>2</sup> This notion has long been at the heart of most studies concerning Attic pottery in Etruria to date, and has shaped the political and economic narrative of Etruscan progress in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.<sup>3</sup> Yet this approach largely precludes any consideration of Etruscan social or cultural explanations which may lie behind the fluctuations in the vase trade in favour of the implicitly Hellenocentric view that these wares carried a high prestige simply because they were Greek. Such an approach does not take into account Etruscan agency in this trade, and it often does not consider the specifically funerary context from which the majority of our Attic pottery derives.

My research has aimed to address this by a quantitative and context-based approach to Attic pottery found at one particular Etruscan site – Tarquinia. The database on which the research is based was derived from two main sources – the catalogues published in the *materiali del museo archeologico nazionale di Tarquinia* series, and the Beazley Archive Pottery Database.<sup>4</sup> Taken together, these sources not only offer a significantly more expansive dataset than many previous statistical studies have used, but they also help to avoid some of the methodological issues which have been noted for studies based solely on Beazley's original lists in *ARV* and *ABV*.<sup>5</sup>

The present study aims to look beyond a simple count of the total number of Attic vases from this site. The analysis has examined the differences in shape and decorative technique and charted these differences over 25-year periods from 550–450 BC, with the intention of examining any preferences evident in the results and whether or not these preferences changed over time. The Etruscan black-figure pottery has also been considered alongside these results to assess the degree to which the local production echoed the trends evident in the imported wares, though it is worth noting that the quantity of the Etruscan black-figure that is preserved is much lower than that of Attic wares, and so it can only offer an indication in this regard.

## Results

Even with the expanded database included here, the total number of vases imported for each quarter century broadly resembles the trends already noted in past studies (fig. 1).<sup>6</sup> There is an initial rise in the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, with the imports peaking in popularity

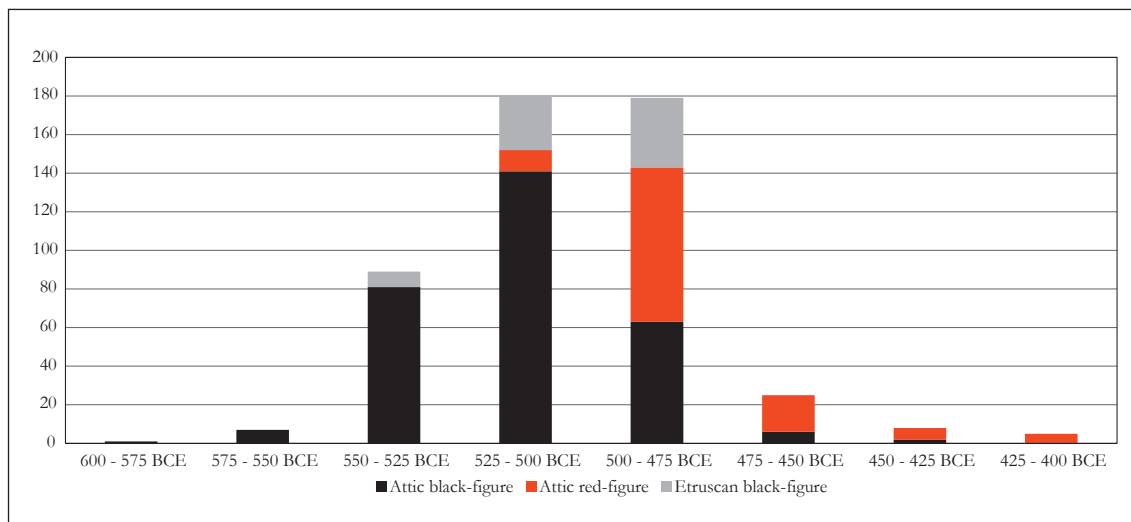


Fig. 1: Total of each fabric per quarter century.

in the last quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the first quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup>, followed by a sharp decline after 475 BC. Yet when we take a closer look at the breakdown of the statistics by shape and fabric over each quarter century, some distinct trends emerge.

### 550–525 BC (fig. 2)

There is a definite preference for two main shapes with 38 amphorae (46.91%) and 32 cups (39.51%) making up the majority of the dataset analysed here. This period also saw the introduction of Etruscan black-figure pottery, with a modest number of 7 vases, all of them amphorae reflecting the preference for this shape found in Attic black-figure.

### 525–500 BC (fig. 3)

The final quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC sees a substantial rise in the number of vases catalogued at Tarquinia, with the pottery peaking at a total of 180 examples across three fabrics: Attic black-figure, Etruscan black-figure, and the newly developed Attic red-figure. With 141 vases attributed to this period, Attic black-figure makes up the majority of this sample set (73.44% of vases for this period). We again see a major preference in shapes, with 73 amphorae, which account for 51.77% of all black-figure pottery in this period. While the total number of black-figure cups is comparable to the preceding period, with 30 examples, their percentage of the total share decreases to 21.28%. We also see a greater diversity in other shapes at this point, although the total number for these remains fairly low.

The total number of Etruscan black-figure grows to 40 vases, accounting for just over 20% of all vases for this period. With 23 examples, amphorae remain the domi-

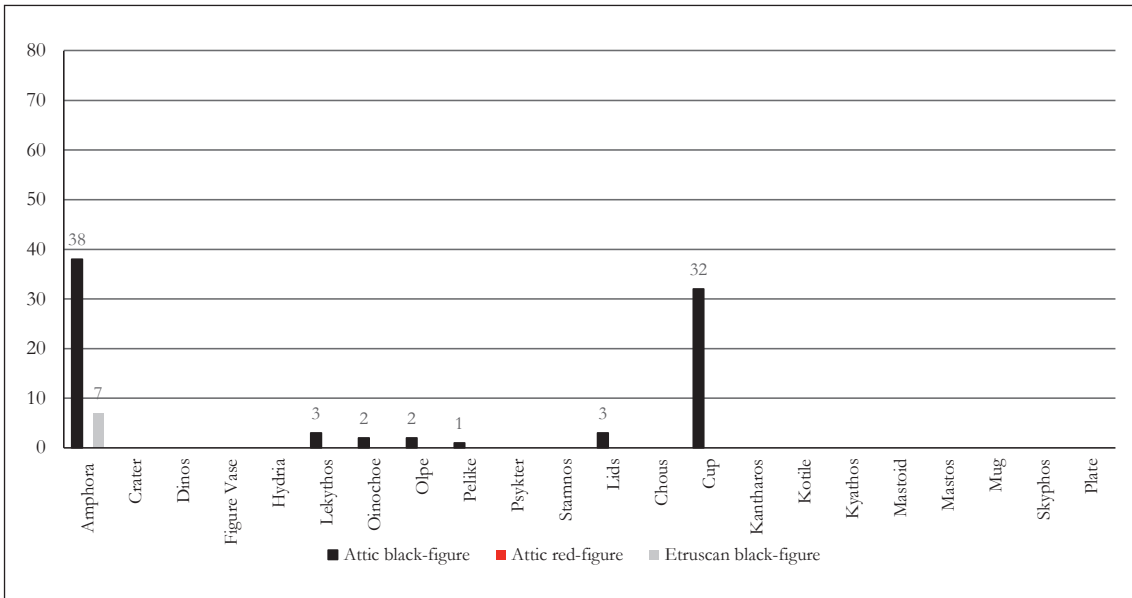


Fig. 2: Vase shapes by fabric c. 550–525 BC.

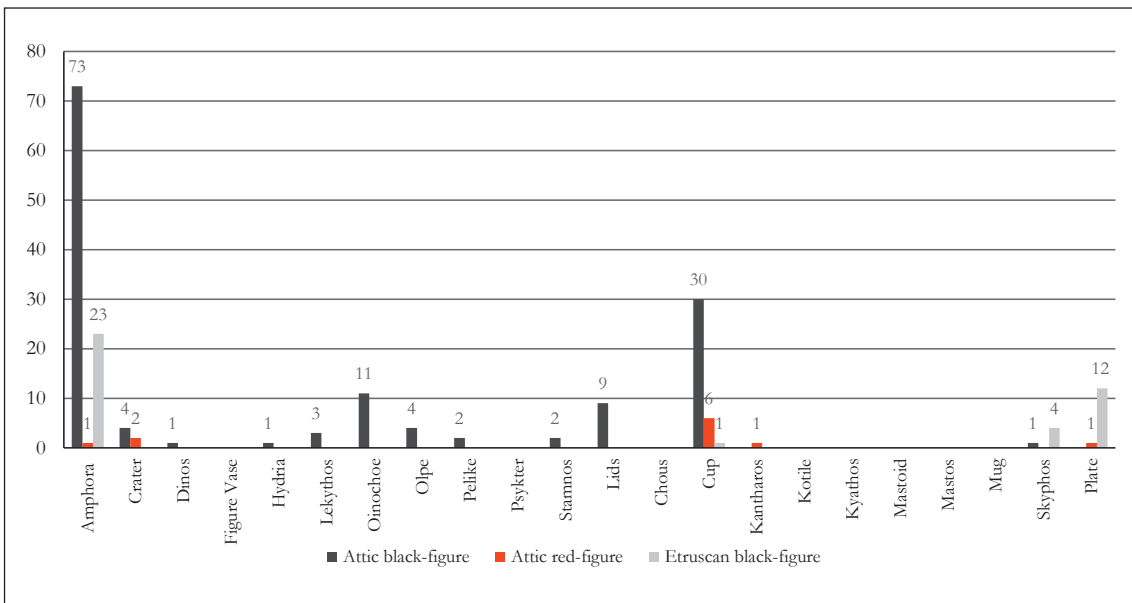


Fig. 3: Vase shapes by fabric c. 525–500 BC.

nant shape in this fabric. The total number is also boosted by the appearance of 12 plates.

Attic red-figure vases begin to appear in the record here, though only in modest numbers. There are only 11 vases in this category (5.73% of all vases), and while the low numbers preclude any statistical certainty, it is worth noting that the cups are the most popular shape in this quarter-century, accounting for 54.55% of this fabric.

#### 500–475 BC (fig. 4)

Although the total number of vases catalogued for this period remains the same as the last, there is a significant shift in the patterns for each fabric coming into the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The total number of Attic black-figure vases drops off significantly with only 57 examples, now only accounting for 37.72% of all vases for this period. In particular there is one exceptional difference in the shapes of Attic black-figure pots, where a sharp change in trends is most evident: Attic black-figure amphorae, which until now had dominated the share of all vases in this ware. With only 8 examples, they now only make up a handful of all of the pottery attributable to this period. This is in stark contrast to the numbers of black-figure amphorae in the previous period.

The total number of cups in Attic black-figure maintains its relative share of this fabric from the preceding period at 20.63%, although the total number has dropped to 14. Of the other shapes, it is perhaps significant that other forms of drinking vessel are also popular. Taken together, all of the drinking vessels comprise 60.32% of all Attic black-figure vases in this quarter century, representing a significant shift away from closed

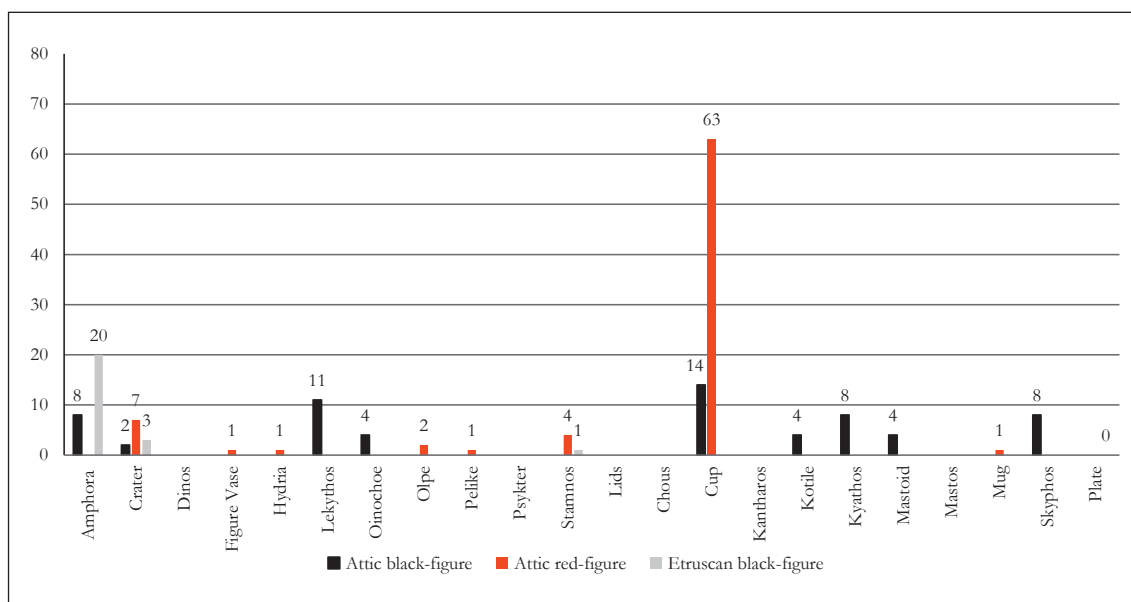


Fig. 4: Vase shapes by fabric c. 500–475 BC.

vessels, and amphorae in particular. In contrast to the Attic wares, Etruscan black-figure pottery retains its preference for amphorae, with 20 examples datable to this period.

With 80 vases, accounting for 47.90% of all vases for this period, Attic red-figure takes over as the dominant fabric and technique for this period. This technique had been developed and perfected in Athens by this point, yet it is notable that the shapes of red-figure vases catalogued here for Tarquinia do not precisely correspond to the trends evident in the earlier black-figure importation. There is an overwhelming preference for cups in Attic red-figure, with 63 examples comprising 78.75% of all vessels in this fabric for this period. The big omission here is amphorae, which had been the dominant shape in black-figure. Their popularity in black-figure is not translated into red-figure, nor are there any major increases in either kraters, or in other closed forms of pottery which could conceivably act as a substitute – such as stamnoi, pelikai, or hydriai. Numbers for these remain fairly low and consistent across all periods and regardless of decorative technique.

#### 475–450 BC (fig. 5)

In the final quarter century considered in this study, the deposition of Etruscan black-figure ware in tombs seems to have largely stopped by this point, with no vessels catalogued in this database, while we see the continued decline of Attic black-figure pottery in Tarquinia, as well as a marked decline in Attic red-figure. There are only six Attic black-figure vases recorded, two lekythoi, three oinochoai, and a single mastos. Both amphorae and cups, which were dominant in earlier periods, are absent by this time.

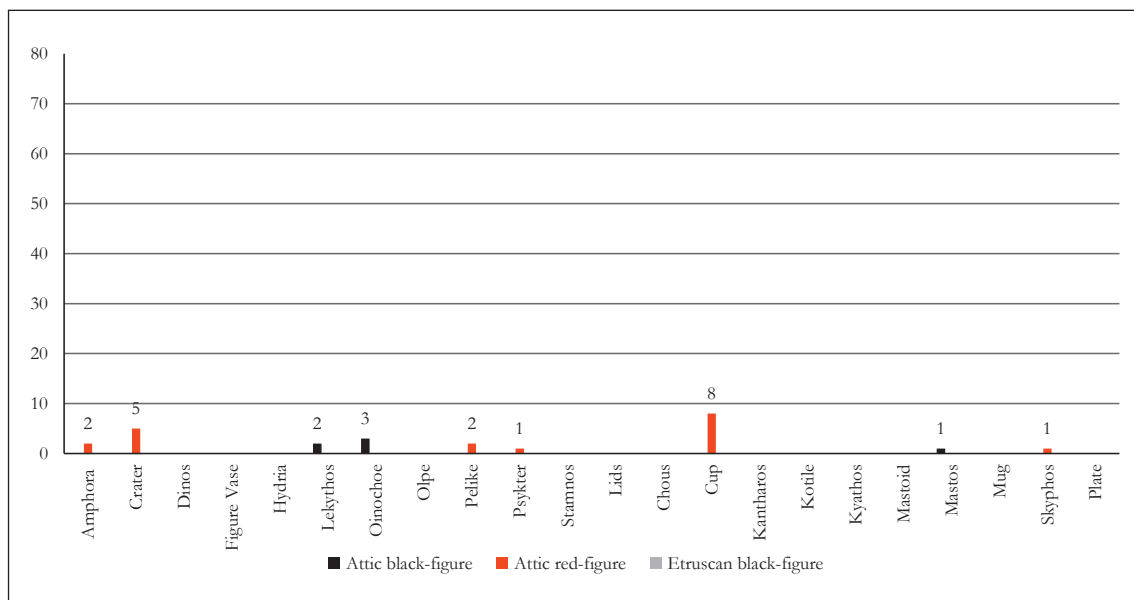


Fig. 5: Vase shapes by fabric c. 475–450 BC.

For Attic red-figure, we only have 19 vases: two amphorae, five kraters, eight cups, two pelikai and a single skyphos and psykter.

Sporadic finds of Attic pottery occur in the funerary record for the rest of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, with two Attic black-figure and six Attic red-figure vases attributable to 450–425 BC, and five Attic red-figure vases for 425–400 BC. This selection consists solely of drinking vessels and lekythoi.

### Discussion of the Data

There are two main shapes which stood out in this analysis of the data: amphorae and cups (fig. 6). This in and of itself is significant, as there were comparatively fewer numbers of the other vase shapes considered to be an integral part of the ‘symposium set’. This indicates that the deposition of a full symposium set of Attic pottery was not the primary motivating factor for the inclusion of these vases within tomb contexts in Tarquinia. Furthermore, these two different shapes followed two very different trends, perhaps indicating a different role within the funerary ritual.

Cups became the predominant shape of drinking vessel preferred in Attic pottery by the Tarquinians for grave goods, and this shape remained a popular choice for deposition in tombs from the mid-sixth through to the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. When red-figure

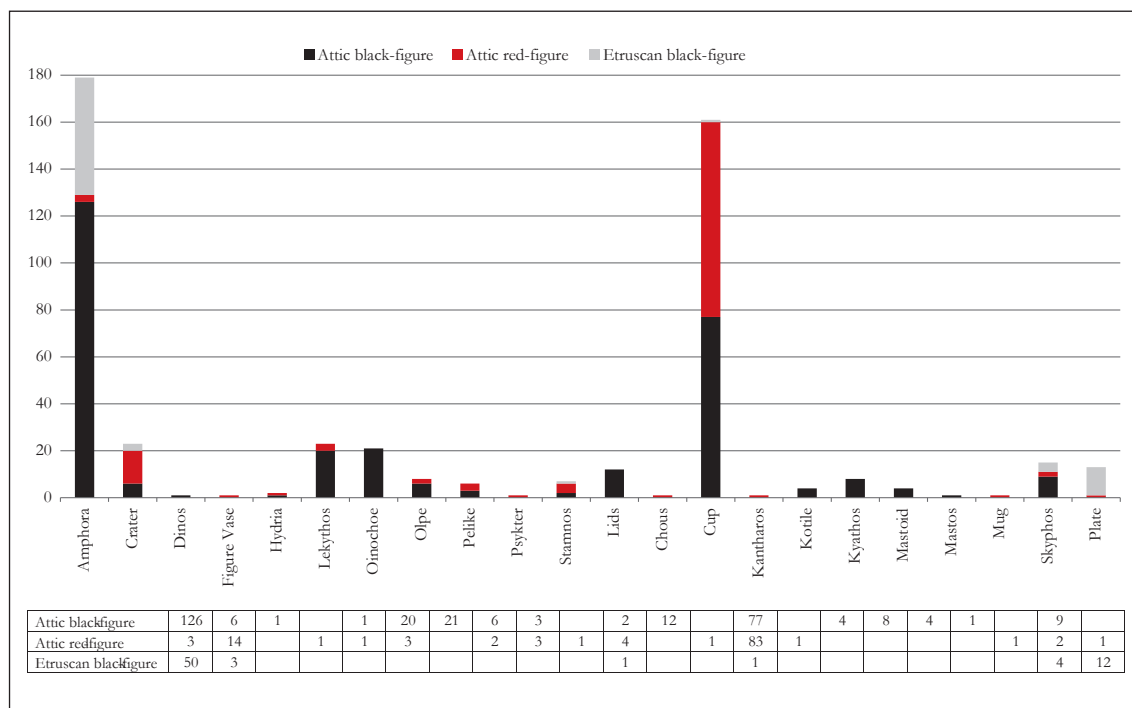


Fig. 6: Total number of each shape by fabric/decorative technique.

pottery was developed in Athens in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, this was quickly exported to Etruria, where the Tarquinians seem to be just as willing to deposit the newer technique of cups in their graves as they had been to use the black-figure cups.

However, this is not the case with the amphorae. Like the cups, these were very popular in the early imports of black-figure. This shape alone accounts for roughly 40% of all the Attic black-figure pottery found in Tarquinian tombs from across all periods. It is also worth noting that the amphora is by far the most preferred shape for the Etruscan black-figured vases, accounting for 70.42% of all shapes in this ware. However, when Attic red-figure was introduced, the newer technique was clearly not preferred for the amphorae – we have only three Attic red-figure amphorae from Tarquinia, in contrast to the total of 126 Attic black-figure examples. We know that large red-figure amphorae were being produced in Athens, so this is not an issue of supply<sup>7</sup>. Therefore the reason for the near complete absence of this shape in this decorative technique in funerary contexts must lie with Etruscan choice – for whatever reason they preferred not to deposit red-figure amphorae in their tombs, even though they readily used red-figure cups.

Indeed, based on a preliminary count of the data from the Beazley archives, we can see a similar pattern from the other major find spots of Attic pottery in Etruria: at Cerveteri, Orvieto, and Vulci. Amphorae account for 40–50% of all Attic black-figure at these three sites (fig. 7). The other notable shape here is the cup, which varies in popularity between 10–30% of all vases in this ware. In Attic red-figure, by contrast, amphorae generally account for less than 10% of all vase shapes at Cerveteri and Orvieto, while at Vulci they reach a share of 14% (fig. 8). At all three sites too, cups are also more popular in the newer technique – generally accounting for over 50% of all Attic red-figure shapes. At Orvieto they appear even more popular, where they make up nearly 80%

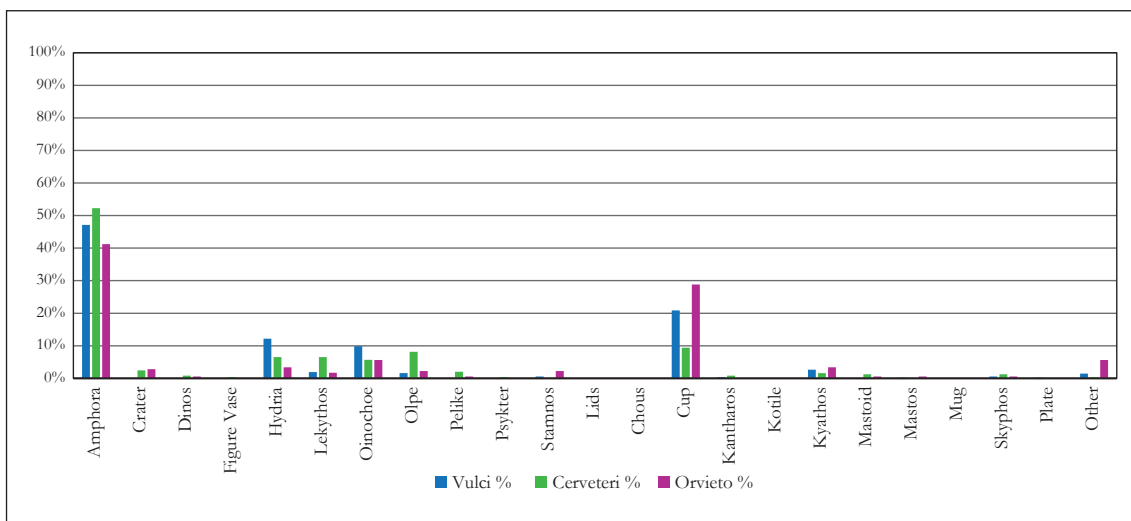


Fig. 7: Shapes as a percentage of the total Attic black-figure.

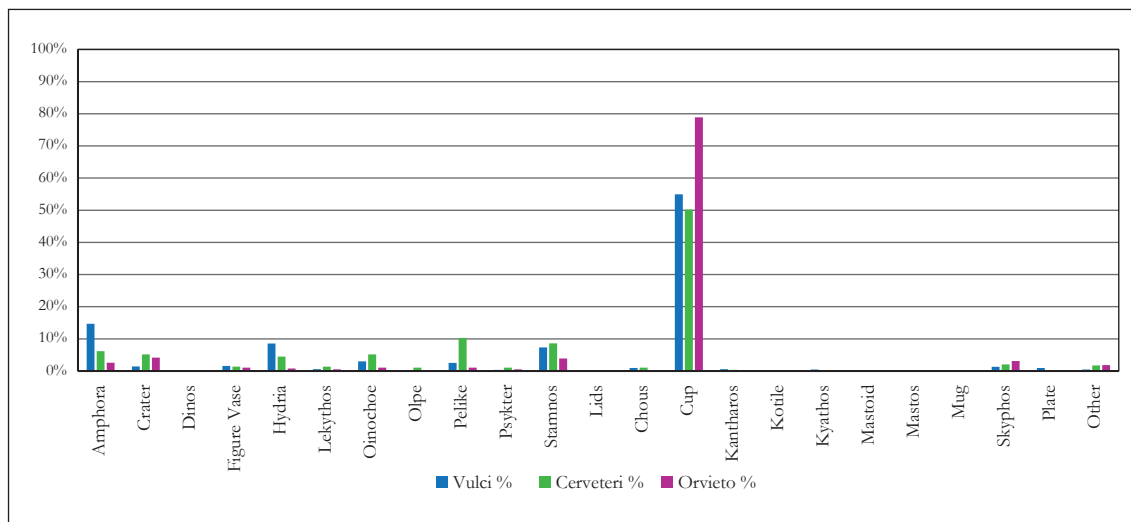


Fig. 8: Shapes as a percentage of the total Attic red-figure.

of the total. While this is only a preliminary count of the data available on the Beazley Archives, the results are indicative that the trends established in the detailed analysis for Tarquinia seem to be broadly applicable to the other major centres of Etruria.

It is likely that the preference for black-figured amphorae in the tombs was tied to Etruscan funerary practice; de la Genière noted that the popularity of these amphorae in Tarquinia is likely tied to their frequent use as cinerary urns in cremation burials, a feature which may be seen to echo the earlier Villanovan practice of depositing cremation burials in biconical vases.<sup>8</sup> If the Attic black-figure amphorae were primarily serving as receptacles of the ashes of the deceased, rather than as symposium vessels, then it may be that the choice of decoration of these particular vases would have been related to its intended funerary function. In particular, Attic red-figure features a very different repertoire of images than the earlier black-figure, and this likely factored into the Etruscans choice of vases for funerary deposition, particularly for those vases serving as cinerary urns.<sup>9</sup>

The continued popularity of cups, however, is more difficult to ascertain with our current understanding of Etruscan funerary rituals, yet it is clear that the specific technique of Attic pottery did not affect the Tarquinians' choice of these vessels in the same way it did for the amphorae. Perhaps their choice was driven by the functional need for a drinking vessel for libations or food offerings in their funerary ritual.<sup>10</sup> Or it may be that the imagery of the cups (and the changes between black-and red-figure therein) did not factor in the choice of these shapes in the same way that it does for the amphorae.

In light of these results, the characterisation of the Etruscans as voracious, non-discriminating consumers of Attic pottery cannot stand. The clear preference exhibited among the data for amphorae and cups shows that they were discerning in which products they chose to inter in their graves. Furthermore, this discerning preference for



particular shapes in particular decorative techniques has much wider implications beyond the funerary contexts within which these vases are found.

The earlier conception of the Etruscans as non-discriminating consumers is integrally related to the theory of the fifth century crisis.<sup>11</sup> As a result of the assumption that the Etruscans would purchase these pots if they had the means, the disappearance of Attic pottery from funerary contexts was interpreted as evidence that the Etruscans no longer had the economic resources available to acquire these wares. However, my research demonstrates that there was a clear buyer preference for black-figure amphorae destined for use as grave goods, and this shows that the Etruscans were very discriminating in their acquisition of these vases.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the period of the sharpest decline in the deposition of Attic pottery in funerary contexts is from 475–470 BC. While this has traditionally been ascribed to the economic and political consequences of the Battle of Cumae in 474 BC, this shift also coincides chronologically with a different and more important development at Athens in terms of pottery production. Shortly before this point, the best potters and painters in the Athenian Kerameikos had largely abandoned the black-figure technique in vase painting in favour of red-figure.<sup>12</sup> Simply put, the clear preference that the Etruscans had displayed for black-figured amphorae could no longer be met by the Athenian market, because the Athenians had stopped producing high quality black-figure vases. We can see the last of this production trickling into Etruria in the low numbers of black-figure amphorae in the first quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, and by the second quarter, the deposition of Attic pottery in Etruscan funerary contexts had all but ceased. While these data clearly show that the Etruscans had agency in selecting which vases to purchase from the Athenians, it also highlights the fact that they did not have direct agency in dictating what the Athenians produced for export.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, it is notable that they did not seek out other markets of black-figure vases to fill the void left by the shift in Athenian production, nor did they increase production of their own black-figure workshops for this purpose. The data presented here suggests that the decline of Attic pottery appearing in Etruscan funerary contexts is a direct result of the Athenian market no longer supplying the vases which the Etruscans desired for this explicit purpose, and this in turn indicates that the place which Attic pottery holds as a pillar of evidence for the 5<sup>th</sup> century crisis in Etruria needs to be reassessed.

### Notes

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<sup>2</sup> A number of more recent studies have aimed at addressing this issue, most notably Reusser 2002, but see also Arafat – Morgan 1994; Paleothodoros 2002; Osborne 2010; Bundrick 2015; Saunders 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Torelli 1984, 55 f.; Haynes 2000, 261–264; Osborne 2004, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Pianu 1980; Tronchetti 1983; Campus 1984; Pierro 1984; Ginge 1987; Ferrari 1988; Nati 2012; BAPD <<https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/pottery/default.htm>> (15.09.2020). The data set used here was compiled in 2015 for my Masters thesis. The incorporation of the pottery from the MMAT series nearly doubled the number of vases from the initial data taken from the BAPD. This expanded data set largely agreed with the broad trends already evident from the BAPD, especially in regard to the two most popular shapes, cups and amphorae, when considering the overall popularity of these shapes; however, the chronology of these vases was more evenly distributed in the MMAT material, whereas in the BAPD, the amphorae tend to be clustered around 525–500, and the cups often postdate 500. There is also a notable increase in the proportion of certain shapes, such as the lekythoi and oinochoai, and the introduction of other shapes not represented in the BAPD material, such as kotylai and kyathoi.

<sup>5</sup> Hannestad 1988, 113–116; Small 1994, 40.

<sup>6</sup> Boardman 1979, 36 f.; Meyer 1980, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Boardman 1975, 216.

<sup>8</sup> de la Genière 1987, 206 f.

<sup>9</sup> See Tonglet, this volume, for a detailed discussion of such uses for cups.

<sup>10</sup> Rhodes-Schroder 2021, for a more developed discussion of this idea.

<sup>11</sup> Torelli 1986, 55 f.; Haynes 2000, 261–264.

<sup>12</sup> Boardman 1974, 146.

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to the reviewer for raising this point.

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