

Etruscan Melting-Pot: Some Considerations about Etruscan Banquet Sets in Funerary Contexts¹

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This paper is a short synthesis of ongoing research devoted to cultural exchanges between ancient Greece and Etruria, from the 9th to the 6th century BC. More specifically, it aims at a better understanding of the Etruscan banquet and other practices involving ceremonial consumption of food and drinks during this long period.²

As we know, many of the Greek vases imported in Etruria were used in the banquet and, more specifically, wine drinking activities. In Etruria especially, where we lack written sources, banquet (and other types of) sets in funerary contexts offer good case studies for analyzing social and cultural practices and intercultural exchange with the rest of the Mediterranean world.³

While earlier, but also more recent, scholarly works tend to treat the Etruscan borrowings of Greek cultural elements as a strong sign of Hellenization, a more recent line of research – on which I base my approach – have shown that this process of cultural reception is neither passive nor simple.⁴

At the outset, a clarification of the term “banquet set” is necessary. Several scholars have worked on banquet assemblages, but space does not allow a full review in this instance.⁵ I will instead propose a definition, which is partly inspired by the work of G. Bartoloni, V. Acconcia and S. ten Kortenaar in an article on early Orientalizing wine-drinking services from funerary contexts in southern Etruria.⁶ A banquet set in an archaeological context is the recurring assemblage of different vase shapes and utensils used for the service of food and drink in a banquet. This assortment of objects reflects a codified practice and its presence in a tomb can be symbolic, representing ritualized actions. An assemblage and its uses do not necessarily coincide with actual practices of everyday life. As shown by the study of Bartoloni and her colleagues, the concept of “recurring assemblage” is very flexible, because the Etruscans of southern Etruria did not seem to follow strict rules in the composition of their sets. Rich tombs manifest the desire to express status by the ostentation and the multiplication of objects, sometimes repeated in luxurious and/or imported versions⁷. While some very rich tombs contain different separate sets,⁸ many simpler graves reveal only the part for the dead, probably selected from a larger funerary banquet. In a tomb, not all the eating and drinking vessels can be related to a banquet. One of the criteria for determining the use of a set is its position within the tomb or around it, which can refer to other types of rituals/ceremonies.⁹

Building on the concept of *services mixtes* developed by J. Gran-Aymerich for sets composed of local bucchero, Greek and other vases,¹⁰ my definition takes into account the full range of banquet-objects found in an archaeological context: metal vessels and utensils, local, Greek, Near Eastern wares etc. See for instance, the vases gathered on

the bronze stand in the *Tomba del Carro di Bronzo* from the Osteria necropolis in Vulci (fig. 1).¹¹ In this example we find a local bucchero vase imitating a Corinthian cotyle, an *impasto* kantharos of local origin, a Protocorinthian kylix and an eastern Greek lekythos.

It has become of crucial importance to extend this comprehensive approach to the material connected with eating activities.¹² Eating and drinking activities in Etruscan contexts, should not be separated, as scholars usually do in a desire to follow the Greek sympotic model.¹³ For instance, the aforementioned tomb from Vulci still presents the *instrumentum* for meat,¹⁴ including a huge bronze cauldron. It still contains animal bones from the “meat broth” in the funerary banquet (fig. 1).

The functional ambiguity in the use of certain shapes further supports this observation. G. Bartoloni and her colleagues observed a tendency for multifunctionality in many shapes in the Etruscan repertoires, implying variability and interchangeability in the composition of sets.¹⁵ A good example – deliberately selected outside southern Etruria – is offered by the 7th century material from the Tolle necropolis of Chianciano Terme.¹⁶ One of the most frequently recurring shapes in those tombs is the *scodella su piede* (a high footed cup), often associated with local globular jars or amphorae (fig. 2).¹⁷



Fig. 1: Reconstitution of the *Tomba del Carro di Bronzo* from the Osteria necropolis in Vulci in the Villa Giulia museum (Rome), ca. 680–670 BC.



Fig. 2: Reconstitution of Tomb 603 from Tolle necropolis in the Museum of Chianciano Terme, ca 700–650 BC.

When isolated, the two shapes form a set for drinking or for pouring libations.¹⁸ However, the *scodella* is also adapted for the service of food in small quantities: archaeologists of the necropolis found bird bones inside several examples.¹⁹ This major shape in the local repertoire is basically multi-functional.

Another much later example, further north in the Etruscan Po Valley, is offered by Tomb 415 from the Certosa cemetery in Bologna (fig. 3).²⁰ The grave contained a female inhumation. Though it had been plundered, the remaining Attic vases formed a wine-drinking set, however without any surviving pouring shape: 2 figured column kraters, 1 owl skyphos, 1 kantharos of the *Saint Valentin* type, 1 lost red figure skyphos, 1 lost black glaze bowl, 1 bronze grater, and 1 black glazed kylix, which still contains eggshells.

In Greece, it is not unusual to find non-liquid funerary offerings in a kylix, notably eggs – real or manufactured.²¹ However, a study by L. C. Pieraccini demonstrated that archaeological finds and iconographic observations do not allow for a direct derivative link between Greek and Etruscan practices around eggs.²² In Etruria, real eggs are a typical – if not the most typical – and very symbolic funerary offering. Also, they constitute an important part of the menu in the Etruscan aristocratic banquet.²³ In the Po Valley, eggs and other food offerings appeared in connection with the practice of depositing banquet vessels in tombs (from the early 8th century BC).²⁴ It is interesting that, in Tomb 415, the kylix mentioned above was selected among other drinking shapes to receive the eggs. Indeed, its shape might recall the locally footed dishes used for food – especially



Fig. 3: Material from Tomb 415, Certosa cemetery, Bologna, ca. 480–450 BC.

eggs and poultry²⁵ – in many tombs, but absent or lost in this case.²⁶ Those dishes go back to the second half of the 8th century BC in the region and are common in Etruscan material culture.²⁷ This case might offer an example of shape substitution, in which a kylix can be perceived as a food dish rather than a drinking cup, and is integrated to an ancient local practice.²⁸

The three examples mentioned above remind us that banquet sets must be regional and chronologically defined. At the same time, there are larger methodological considerations, to which I shall now briefly turn.

The first is theoretical. In order to approach the question of the relation between Etruscans and Greeks with a more open mind, I chose to follow the concept of “entangled pottery”, as proposed by Ph. Stockhammer.²⁹ Without entering into too many details, I will only mention Stockhammer’s idea that when an object arrives from abroad into a new cultural context, accompanied or not with the knowledge of its original function, it can have an impact on people and their practices.³⁰ Also, the “receptive” culture will have an impact on the object, whether physical (an imported object can be modified or imitated with modifications) or functional. The “entangled object” is culturally

redefined in its new context and it becomes something more than the simple mix of the two cultural traditions. This line of thought can usefully be applied to Greek vases in Etruscan contexts. For example, the Warrior Tomb in Tarquinia, recently published by A. Babbi and U. Peltz.³¹ Dated to ca 730–720 BC, it offers one of the first examples of an Orientalizing assemblage in an Etruscan funerary context. The tomb also revealed a real melting pot of different traditions regarding the shapes and the manufacture of the vases.

In this instance, I will only point out two groups of objects. First, four local impasto one-handed cups (kyathoi) and a two-handed cup (kantharos) can be considered together with two exceptional silver vases of the same two shapes (fig. 4). Those local shapes in precious metal – among the first examples in Etruria – reiterate the common impasto versions, following a newly adopted Near Eastern tradition for luxurious drinking cups.³² The second group is the set – for wine and food service, as well as other ritual uses – of fine geometric ware, probably locally made (fig. 5). The vases of this second



Fig. 4: Three impasto and two silver one- and two-handed cups from the “Warrior Tomb” in Tarquinia.

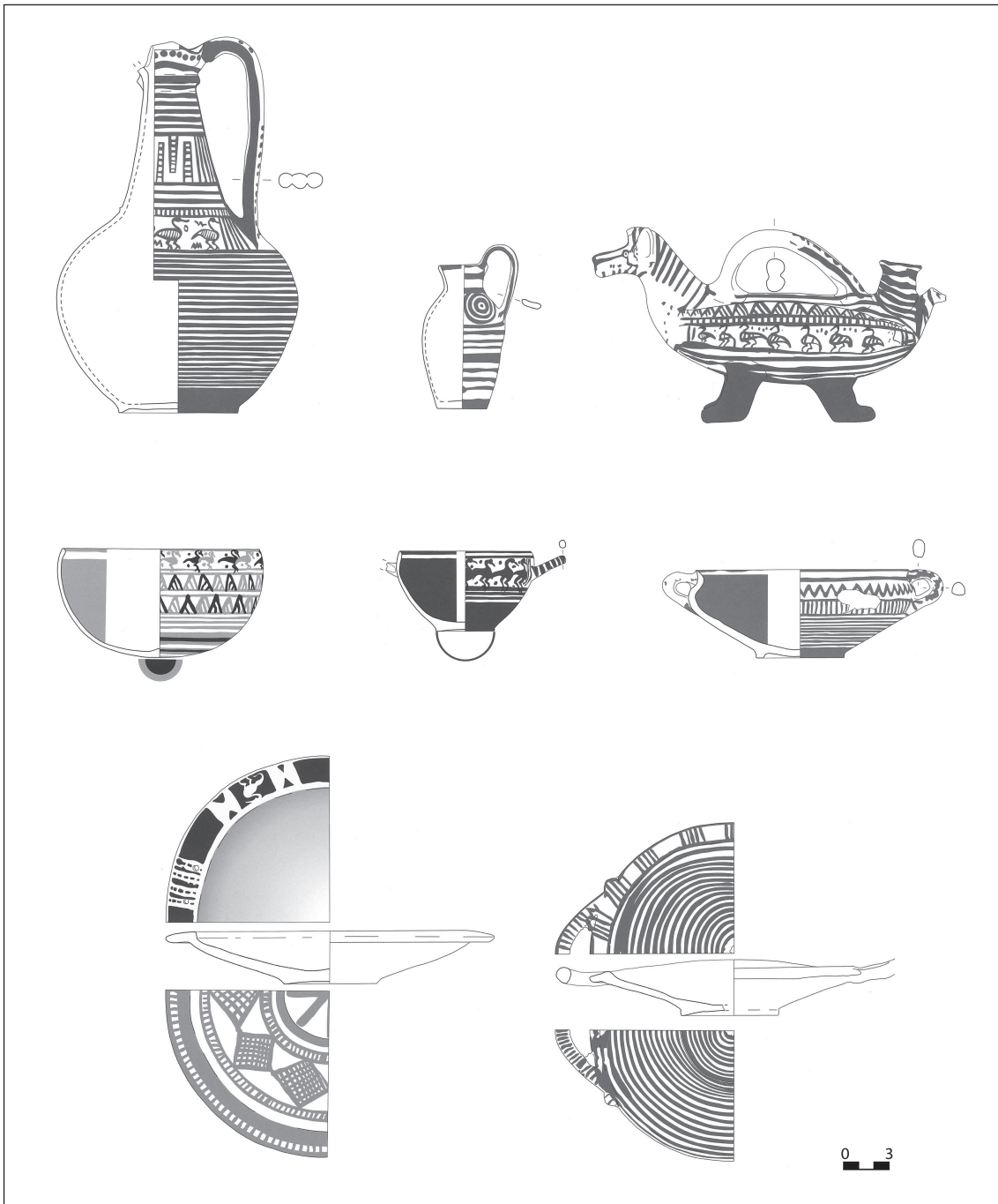


Fig. 5: Selection of the fine Italo-geometric ware from the “Warrior Tomb” in Tarquinia.

group present Greek and Levantine shapes.³³ As shown by A. Babbi, their painted decoration combines – through a complex game of successive filters and influences – patterns and decorative techniques from varied Greek and Phoenician areas: Euboea, the Cyclades, Cyprus, Crete, Corinth, Pitheculasae and Rhodes.³⁴

Those two groups of objects show that the non-Etruscan traditions represented have been already mingled, transformed and integrated into the local Villanovan tradition, which in turn was also changed. Those objects are “entangled” and we can suspect that the “ritual” or actions performed with them were also “entangled”. Here, we are facing neither an Homeric banquet nor an actual *symposion* nor a royal Assyrian feast. The result was a new kind of Villanovan banquet, with an equipment assembled for a very high-ranking individual connected with his world.

The other methodological subject to be raised is the identification of ancestral traditions through the study of the origins of shapes. C. Iaia showed that the consumption of fermented drinks was already an important activity in central Italy before the arrival of Greek communal practices during the early Iron Age.³⁵ He traced those activities to middle and final Bronze Age cultures of different Italic areas.³⁶ Some objects connected with those earliest practices survived through time and cultural changes, to be then adapted to the new needs of the Villanovan/Etruscan cultures.

The Etruscan one-handed cup, also called *kyathos*, is one of those “primitive” shapes.³⁷ According to Iaia, it appears that Proto- and Villanovan one-handed cups, inherited from Bronze Age antecedents, were influenced by bronze types from northern and central Europe.³⁸ This ancient local and European background for formal drinking habits is significant and places the origins of the Etruscan one-handed cup in a non-Aegean tradition. From the Orientalizing period on, the *kyathos* appears in different types of Etruscan ceremonial sets (not always connected with the banquet³⁹), whether in “poor” or prestigious material, as shown by the Traquinian Warrior Tomb.

Regarding sets in funerary contexts, M. Torelli observed that in southern Etruria and ancient *Latium* the one handled cup is part of a set, together with a type of globular amphora (also called Latial/spiral amphora), from the 9th century on.⁴⁰ Torelli recognizes this association as the reflection of “a primitive rituality connected with wine”, preceding contacts with the Greek *symposion*, and involving local wine production.⁴¹ This ancestral tradition survived at least until the late Archaic period in the tombs of Caere, where the deposition of bucchero and Attic descendants of the two shapes are found: the small *kyathos* and the “Nikosthenic amphora”.⁴²

Tracing back the long history of the one-handed cup/*kyathos* – and its variants in impasto, metal, bucchero and Attic black-figure (fig. 7) – helps us to identify the local traditions and their development. It clarifies how foreign elements were selected, transformed and finally incorporated into local habits and how they affected them without actually replacing them.

My paper concludes with a last famous example involving the Attic *kyathos*: the pair of tombs known as *Tomba del Kottabos* and *Tomba dei Vasi del Pittore di Micali* from



Fig. 6: Material from the *Tomba del Kottabos* and the *Tomba dei Vasi del Pittore di Micali* from the Osteria necropolis in Vulci, Villa Giulia museum (Rome).

the Osteria necropolis in Vulci (fig. 6).⁴³ Dated to the last quarter of the 6th century BC, those two chamber tombs shared a common atrium and belonged to a young man and a woman, respectively.

When we look at the contents of late 6th century tombs in southern Etruria, such as those examples in Vulci, we are almost blinded by the dominant black and red colors of the Attic pottery and its local derivations by the Micali Painter. The influence of the Attic symposium is certain and strong, especially marked by the poverty of bucchero, impasto and *acroma* ware in those assemblages⁴⁴.

However, the presence of a monumental kyathos in each tomb (fig. 6.1–2), one in bucchero, the other in Etruscan black-figure, and of two small Attic black-figure kyathoi (fig. 6.3–4 and fig. 7), reminds us of the still surviving Villanovan funerary banquet. Food is also represented by local dishes and the iron knife in each tomb. In the female grave, the knife – generally connected with dividing meat, perhaps within a sacrificial practice⁴⁵ – was found in a bronze basin, probably serving for food.⁴⁶ Meat consumption, and possibly sacrifice, are further implied, in the male grave, by the iron spits and might be connected with the iron ax as well.⁴⁷



Fig. 7: One of the two Attic kyathoi in the *Tomba dei Vasi del Pittore di Micali* in Vulci, Villa Giulia museum (Rome) inv. 131316.

The assemblages in our two tombs offer incomplete sets from a Greek point of view (fig. 8). There is no shape for mixing water and wine, as kraters are almost absent from Vulcian tombs in the Archaic period.⁴⁸ It has been suggested that they were made of metal and therefore too precious to be deposited in tombs. The question arises whether the amphorae and hydriae present in both graves could have fulfilled the function of mixing shapes.⁴⁹ If we cannot reject those hypotheses, we can neither exclude the possibility of the absence or the rarity of the wine and water mixing practice, especially in the rather middle class social level represented in those two graves. The absence of a pouring shape in the Kottabos tomb is striking, and it contrasts with the redundancy of oinochoai and olpai in the female tomb.

The Attic kyathoi (fig. 6.3–4 and fig. 7) offer the only drinking shape in the female tomb, which points out to an exclusively local practice, as this production (or its Etruscan model) was virtually never used in Greece.⁵⁰ Regarding the drinking function, the Kottabos Tomb presents four Attic kylikes, among which a monumental eye cup attributed to Oltos (fig. 6.5).⁵¹ Sh. Bundrick's research on Attic eye-cups showed that red-figured and bilingual kylikes with large eyes seem to have been, at least in part, catered to

the Etruscan market, where we find the earliest, best and biggest examples.⁵² Oversized kylikes, with or without eyes, have been found broken or upside down at the entrance of tombs or at the feet of the corpse, which is the case of the Oltos cup in the Kottabos grave.⁵³ While we do not know if and how we should distinguish several sets in those graves, we should at least eliminate this big kylix from the banquet service of the Kottabos Tomb. It was rather part of another ritual.⁵⁴ Bundrick concludes that the presence of Attic eye cups in Etruria is not at all a sign of Hellenization. As the other Greek vases, they were integrated and functionally transformed for the local uses.

D. Paleothodoros, who studied the iconography of the figured vases in those two tombs, showed that the “completeness” of funerary assemblages could be a matter of iconography, not only shapes or functions.⁵⁵ He also emphasized the possible, deeply re-

Functions/Uses	<i>Tomba A2/1998 dei Vasi del Pittore di Micali</i> ♀	<i>Tomba A9/1998 del Kottabos</i> ♂
Mixing	0	0
Storage/Mixing ?	2 Attic amphorae 1 Etruscan bf amphora 1 Etruscan bf hydria	3 Attic amphorae 1 Attic hydria 1 transport amphora (Greek)
Dipping/Pouring	1 bronze oinochoe 2 Attic oinochoai 1 Attic olpe	0
Drinking	2 Attic kyathoi	3 Attic kylikes (1 Attic kylix, monumental)
Food	1 local dish 2 bronze basins 1 iron knife	1 local bowl 1 iron knife 11 (?) iron spits (1 iron ax)
Other banquet/ sympotic items	1 bone plectrum (music?) Bronze elements of a foldable table?	1 bone plectrum (music?) 1 bronze kottabos game
Presenting liquids/other ritual?	1 Etruscan bf kyathos (monumental)	1 bucchero kyathos (monumental)
Other (gender, status/role, funerary)	1 Attic lekythos 1 bronze mirror Silver collar (elements)	1 Samian lekythos Bronze elements from a shield (?) and from a leather helmet 1 iron ax

Fig. 8: Table showing the repartition of the grave goods from the *Tomba del Kottabos* and the *Tomba dei Vasi del Pittore di Micali* according to their functions.

ligious value of Attic vases in Etruscan contexts and demonstrated how the local figured pottery completes the imports with symbolic images, absent from the Attic repertoire.⁵⁶

Our conclusions concerning the two tombs are similar to those of the ones observed by Bartoloni and her colleagues for the early Orientalizing graves of southern Etruria. The principle is of accumulation and ostentation rather than of fixed sets. Of course, the survey is here, with our few examples, very reduced and it should reach a quantitative quality before getting conclusive. However, our observations remind us that the older rituals did not completely disappear in front of Greek influences and imports; they were sometimes “disguised” in a prestigious Attic mantel.

A better understanding of the practices connected with local and imported vessels in Etruscan cemeteries, requires study of the composition, content and the place of objects within their Etruscan contexts. We have to look from what we think might be an Etruscan perspective. Slowly, a complex panorama of interactions appears, revealing parts of the Etruscan culture from a more autonomous point of view.

Notes

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² I use here the word “banquet” with the same meaning as “feast”.

³ See Iaia 2016, 31 with bibliography.

⁴ For instance, the works of Kohler – Naso 1991, 45; Tuck 1994; Torelli 2000; Iaia 2007; Isler-Kerényi 2009; Bunderick 2015.

⁵ For Early Iron Age drinking sets in Southern Etruria: Iaia 2016; 2006. For the Orientalizing period: Batino 1998, 24; Rathje 1983.

⁶ Bartoloni et al. 2012, 207. 216.

⁷ Bartoloni et al. 2012, 258. 260. 266–268.

⁸ Batino 1998, 17, nn. 27. 24.

⁹ Bérard 2014; Bunderick 2015, 314.

¹⁰ Gran-Aymerich 2017, 193–200.

¹¹ Partly published in Moretti Sgubini 2000, 568–570.

¹² Batino 1998, 24.

¹³ For the Greek symposion, see for instance Wecowski 2014. For a synthetic and useful definition of the Attic symposion: Lynch 2015, 231–233.

¹⁴ Kohler – Naso 1991.

¹⁵ Bartoloni et al. 2012, 216f. 260. 266. 268.

¹⁶ For the *scodella su piede*: Paolucci 2015, 34, n° 8.

¹⁷ Paolucci 2015, 234.

- ¹⁸ For instance, the four *scodelle* and four amphorae assembled in the vestibule of Tomb 401: Paolucci 2015, 135–138. For libations: Paolucci 2015, 67. 375.
- ¹⁹ Paolucci 2015, 376.
- ²⁰ Govi 1999, 51 f. n° 22.
- ²¹ Algrain 2013, 54–56.
- ²² Pieraccini 2014, 284–288.
- ²³ Pieraccini 2014; Bertani 1995, 59.
- ²⁴ Bertani 1995, 53.
- ²⁵ Bertani 1995, 58 nn. 142; 59 and table 2.
- ²⁶ Mattioli 2013, 228 f.
- ²⁷ Tovoli 1989, 244 f.; Bertani 1995, 53 f. n. 110.
- ²⁸ For imported kylikes and skyphoi used for eggs and poultry: Bertani 1995, 59 and table 2.
- ²⁹ Stockhammer 2010, 89–103. For a large reflection on the concept of entanglement applied to archaeology see: Hodder 2012.
- ³⁰ Stockhammer 2010, 89 f.
- ³¹ Babbi – Peltz 2013.
- ³² Babbi 2013, 65 (silver: Kat. 4 and 5, impasto: Kat. 97–100).
- ³³ Babbi 2013, Kat. 97–100.
- ³⁴ Babbi 2018, 341 fig. 5 “transculturality map”; Babbi 2013, 65 tab. 2.
- ³⁵ Iaia 2016, 32 f.; Iaia 2007, 268–270.
- ³⁶ Iaia 2013, 374 f. 379 f.
- ³⁷ Zanini 2000; Torelli 2000, 92 f.; Gran Aymerich 2017, 93 (shape 5900). 191; Tonglet 2018, 30–35 fig. 1–8.
- ³⁸ Iaia 2007, 262 f. 268–270.
- ³⁹ Ceremonial sets found all over Etruria (8th–6th centuries BC) and composed of several small kyathoi buried (sometimes within an *olla*) in different kinds of contexts: Bartoloni et al. 2012, 201–206.
- ⁴⁰ Torelli 2000, 92 f.
- ⁴¹ Torelli 2000, 92. Following the aforementioned observations, I think we have to include the small dishes and larger bowls for the service of food to that set.
- ⁴² Tonglet 2018, 34. 268 f.
- ⁴³ Moretti Sgubini – Ricciardi 2001, 220 f.
- ⁴⁴ About the progressive disappearance of bucchero pottery in funerary contexts of Southern Etruria by the end of the 6th century BC and its replacement by Attic pottery: Gran-Aymerich 2017, 160; Batino 1998, 10.
- ⁴⁵ For the connection between the meat instrumentum and sacrifice, at least for earlier periods: Kohler – Naso 1991; Iaia 2016, 40 f.
- ⁴⁶ Moretti Sgubini – Ricciardi 2001, 228.
- ⁴⁷ Moretti Sgubini – Ricciardi 2001, 221. 238. About the “meat service”: Kohler – Naso 1991. About knives: Batino 1998, 24.
- ⁴⁸ Hannestad 1988, 125.
- ⁴⁹ Bundrick 2015, 324.
- ⁵⁰ Tonglet 2018, 252–261.

⁵¹ Moretti Sgubini – Ricciardi 2001, 233f. III.B.7.5; Bundrick 2015, 321f.

⁵² Bundrick 2015, 295. 331.

⁵³ Bundrick 2015, 319.

⁵⁴ Bundrick 2015, 310–314. 322.

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Fig. 1: Courtesy of the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia. – Fig. 2: Courtesy of the Museo Etrusco delle Acque di Chianciano Terme. – Fig. 3: Courtesy of Bologna, Museo Civico Archeologico, Photo Archive. – Fig. 4: ©Antikensammlung Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz – inv. Misc. 6326, B90; Misc.6326, B91; Misc. 6326, B92; Misc. 6326, C96; Misc. 6326, C97. Photographer: Johannes Laurentius. – Fig. 5: Drawings by Dr. Andrea Babbi (from Babbi – Peltz (eds), 2013, kat. 77–79, 81, 83, 85, 90–91). – Fig. 6: Courtesy of the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia. – Fig. 7: Su concessione del Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia. – Fig. 8: by the author.

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