

Food and Dining in Etruscan Funerary Ritual:
Foreign Influence and Cultural Exchange

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The late eighth to early fifth centuries BC¹ were a time of cultural growth in Etruria, fueled by a growing economy and active maritime trade. This time is generally considered to be the time when the Greeks imported much of their culture to the Etruscans and gave Etruscan culture its distinct Hellenistic cast. Since excavations have been carried out on only a very few Etruscan settlements, this influence is instead most noticeable in burials where foreign elements have been found, including imported dining wares and painted banquet scenes with plenty of Greek elements. The presence of these elements has in the past been interpreted as the Etruscans allowing facets of Greek civilization to overtake their own. However, as Bruno D'Agostino states, "...in the ancient Mediterranean world the moment of death is the occasion on which the community tends to make explicit its own system of values..." and funerary images are the society's own description of itself.² Thus, as shown by their own burials, the Etruscans absorbed cultural elements from Greece and the Near East and adapted them for use with their own traditions.

When discussing Etruscan culture, the roughly 250 years of early cultural development are divided into two periods: the Orientalizing, c. 720-575 and the Archaic, c. 575-480. Both names reference the art styles found among Etruscan remains dating from each era and presume the adoption of other cultural aspects along with the eastern and Greek art styles. Although the names themselves are accurate enough, the implication of Etruscan cultural inferiority which is commonly associated with them is not. Still, to avoid confusion the same era names will be used with the understanding that they only describe the appearance of foreign elements in Etruria. In order to discuss cultural exchange in Etruria it is worth taking a brief look at the development of the Etruscans and their relationship to the societies of the wider Mediterranean world.

¹ All dates given are BC unless referring to modern scholarship.

² Bruno D'Agostino, "Image and Society in Archaic Etruria" *Journal of Roman Studies* 79, (1989): 1.

Ancient historians speculated on Etruscan origins and the consensus among many placed the Etruscans as coming from various areas of the Near East. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, as Massimo Pallottino mentioned, instead proposed an autochthonous origin in his *Roman Antiquities*.³ Pallottino himself developed the origins theory that has come to be accepted by modern scholars, describing in his theory a complex cultural development in which the nascent Etruscans were influenced by contact with other established cultures. Although quite similar to Dionysius' theory, the autochthonous origin assumes that a pre-existing civilization was already in place and developed in an isolated manner, rather than one which was in the process of forming.⁴ This origins theory also marks the start of the process of cultural exchange through growing trade which became evident in the Orientalizing period.

Etruscan civilization was based on agriculture, trade, and vast mineral resources. Its territory contained plains and rolling hills and the land was very good for growing the staples of antiquity, grain, vines, olives and flax as well as supporting livestock. The “rich ploughlands of Etruria” that Livy described (IX.35) allowed Bronze Age Etruscans to foster a relatively self-contained economy in spite of their contact with Mycenaeans and Apennine peoples to the north.⁵ As the culture developed a surplus economy grew seen in the extent of cultivation. An effective system of rock-cut tunnels with inspection shafts shows the efforts made for both drainage and irrigation and the development of more efficient iron tools helped increase production.⁶

³ Massimo Pallottino, *The Etruscans*, trans. J. Cremona, ed. David Ridgway, 2nd English ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 64-66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 78-81.

⁵ Mario Torelli, “History: Land and People,” *Etruscan Life and Afterlife: A Handbook of Etruscan Studies* ed. Larissa Bonfante (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 47-50.

⁶ Sybille Haynes, *Etruscan Civilization: A Cultural History* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), 60.

Although agriculturally self-contained the Etruscan economy bloomed through maritime trade, usually exporting raw minerals or bulk goods. The Phoenicians had established colonies around the western Mediterranean and by the eighth century fostered trade relations with Etruscan metal producers and suppliers. In exchange the Phoenicians may have been the sources of Oriental grave goods found in aristocratic tombs in Tarquinia, Veii, and Vetulonia. Interestingly, a select few Etruscans may have had more personal ties to Phoenician traders as Phoenician coarse ware, seldom exported, was found in a tomb at Populonia.⁷

The Greeks of Euboea had established trading posts called *emporía* on the north coast of Syria. Soon they expanded, founding a trading post on the island of Pithekoussai in the Bay of Naples in the early eighth century. Its close proximity to Etruria and rivers leading into Latium and Campania made it a prime location for trade and with its success more *emporía* were founded. Votive offerings of Etruscan origin were found at sanctuaries, and North Syrian goods were traded through the Euboans.⁸

Etruscan trade contacts eventually reached as far as Spain and Gaul. Few items have been found in Etruria from the area but by the amount of items exported to Western Europe we can reasonably assume that precious metals were exchanged for bulk goods, as the metals would not be identifiable in the archaeological record. In Spain native towns produced imitations of Etruscan wares in the mid-sixth century. In Gaul, where initial contact occurred even before the Greek colonization of Marseilles, Etruscan objects have been found including funerary bronzes and amphorae; the tombs of Hallstatt princes in Celtic Gaul contained prestige gifts of Etruscan

⁷ Jean MacIntosh Turfa, "International Contacts: Commerce, Trade, and Foreign Affairs," in *Etruscan Life and Afterlife: A Handbook of Etruscan Studies*, ed. Larissa Bonfante (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 66-67.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

razors, fibulae, and bronze vessels. By 575, whole cargoes of bucchero vessels and amphorae were being transported by Etruscan merchants to the interior of Gaul.⁹

As a result of this trade the foreign elements seen in burials seeped into Etruscan culture. How these elements were transmitted is important since this process establishes the nature of the influence on Etruscan culture. Admittedly, there is difficulty in finding a model of acculturation since many of the closest cultural exchange models rely on some sort of power imbalance. These models, influenced by 19th century classical historians such as Barrett and Haverfield, contain a colonizing or imperialist aspect which was absent during the periods discussed in this paper. Foreign colonies did exist near Etruria but there was no real attempt to colonize within the territory. As such there was no pressure to adopt the ways of either a peaceful invader or outright conqueror such as in early Anglo-Saxon Britain or any of the Roman provinces. Instead Etruria was on an equal footing with Greece and the Near East and at the highest point of their naval dominance, the thalassocracy of the Orientalizing period, even had the upper hand in at least some areas. In this light the cultural exchange was a matter of choice rather than survival necessity for the Etruscans.

There are several models of acculturation which contain elements applicable to Etruscan development. The first, creolization, is normally a linguistic model which describes the merging of two languages into one distinct dialect. However, it has grown to describe the kind of multicultural development commonly found in the Caribbean and American South. Jane Webster took this process and applied it to the Roman provinces, focusing mainly on Roman Britain, replacing the usual romanization. Most importantly to this paper, she described creole material culture in the archaeological record. Similar to creole language, this material culture blends the two parent cultural traditions and can then be manipulated differently according to

⁹ Ibid., 75-76.

context though the material object itself remains the same. This results in a highly ambiguous archaeological record especially if there is no other evidence to help explain the shades of contextual meanings.¹⁰

As mentioned above there was no colonization within Etruria and as Webster states, creolization is specifically defined by the negotiation between old and new cultural aspects resulting from the “asymmetrical power relations” found within the context of colonization.¹¹ Because no separate distinct culture rose from the interaction of Etruria and any of the cultures it regularly interacted with, the creolization model cannot be fully applied. This also eliminates similar models such as cultural fusion or hybridization, which also require a new and distinct culture developed from the interaction of parent cultures.

However, the ambiguity found in creole material culture is similar to that found in the Etruscan archaeological record. Although the Etruscans were not negotiating between their own culture and a colonizing one, a similar dual-usage in material objects would have developed through the consistent contact resulting from international trade. With active involvement in ancient trade, foreign cultural objects became familiar and their use adopted when interacting with foreigners. Eventually those elements were then adapted to Etruscan uses, since it is easier to use one set of elements in multiple contexts rather than constantly switching between whole sets of customs and objects. Etruria was not by any means an isolated place and these elements would have been useful in both trade ports and the inland cities.

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill’s redefinition of the models of hellenization and romanization is another discussion which bears heavily on my own. He argued that much of the terminology used in discussing cultural changes, including hellenization and romanization, incorporate biases

¹⁰ Jane Webster, “Creolizing the Roman Provinces,” *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 105, no. 2 (Apr. 2001): 218.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

of nineteenth century European colonialism. This includes the notion of an inherent superiority of Roman and Greek cultures, as well as the model of a one-way acculturation that does not take into account any reciprocal processes by which each culture takes elements of the other in order to accommodate each other better.¹²

The specific use of the term “hellenize” and its variants is also examined. Wallace-Hadrill points out that the use of the term in ancient sources was an active one. Hellenizing was something a non-Greek did to himself, a specifically Greek way of speaking and thinking. For instance, Wallace-Hadrill translates Aeschines’ description of part-Scythian Demosthenes as “hellenizing in his speech” (*in Ctes.* 172.11) and Plutarch’s Cleitomachus, the Carthaginian philosopher, who “was taught to hellenize.” (*de Alex. fort.* 328d2)

Although these are more direct translations of the Greek than is typically published, even well-established English translations hold the spirit of the active, self-induced process: C.D. Adams has Aeschines call Demosthenes a “Greek-tongued” foreigner and F.C. Babbitt has Cleitomachus “adopt Greek ways.” These are both in direct contrast to the passive usage of one group hellenizing a conquered people found in modern scholarship. The closest reference to forced hellenization is when Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria forced the Jews to hellenize themselves, rather than hellenizing them.¹³

This concept of self-induced hellenization is crucial to understanding the cultural influences of the Greeks in Etruria. As Wallace-Hadrill described, a non-Greek could hellenize himself but still remain the same person and in no way diminish his own native identity. The hellenizing process has specifically Greek requirements, but the general back and forth process of one culture absorbing from another without changing its fundamental identity applies equally

¹² Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome’s Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

to any of the cultural interactions within the Mediterranean.¹⁴ This closely describes what occurred in Etruria during the Orientalizing and Archaic periods, in which the Etruscans absorbed certain aspects of other Mediterranean cultures but did not fundamentally change their own identity.

This free adaptation of cultural aspects process is uncommon in the ancient world, since a specific feature of the adaptation is the lack of pressure by a conquering or invading people, but it has some precedence as described by Burgess and Shennan's "cult package" theory. This is best seen in the material record of prehistoric cultures of Bronze Age Britain. Early in the second millennium a very distinctive kind of pottery appeared which originally was thought to mark an invasion of a separate ethnic group called the Beaker Folk, named for the shape of their pottery. This pottery had been found scattered across Central and Western Europe, but due to more detailed study and a reconsideration of the meaning of material culture, the appearance of the pottery is now considered to have been a result of the spread of material culture from the continent. The Beaker Folk in Britain were not a foreign group who travelled throughout Europe and eventually found themselves on the British Isle, but were simply indigenous people in contact with continental people who chose to use and produce the pottery.¹⁵ The fact that not all Bronze Age people living in Britain at the time used the pottery indicates that the pottery was likely part of a popular fashion or style of material production, the cult package which spread from group to group across continental Europe and into Britain.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵ Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21.

¹⁶ Richard J. Harrison, *The Beaker Folk: Copper Age Archaeology in Western Europe* (New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1980), 71. The idea of the cult package originally appeared in Colin Burgess and Steven Shennan, "The Beaker Phenomenon: Some Suggestions," *Settlement and Economy in the Third and Second Millennia B.C.*, Oxford University Press 1976. This is from a series of British archaeological reports presented at a conference at University of Newcastle upon Tyne. However, the original conference papers are unavailable to me so I instead refer to the summary of the idea given by Harrison.

This idea of the cult package along with Wallace-Hadrill's hellenization model and Webster's ambiguous material culture combine to describe the process of cultural exchange in Etruria. The cult packages of Oriental and Greek styles spread across the Mediterranean and were picked up by the Etruscans. Occasionally other styles, such as Egyptian, were transmitted as well. In the same way one could hellenize oneself, one could also orientalize oneself, using the Oriental cult package. As with hellenization, this did not mean that an Etruscan gave up his native identity, only that he learned these styles to better participate in the outside world. However, this would leave an ambiguous material culture, since the objects used would not necessarily be obviously used for both Etruscan and Oriental uses.

This process is best seen in the references to food and dining in Etruscan burials. Food and dining were common themes in Iron Age burials and continued into the Orientalizing and Archaic periods. It is likely that in this period the Etruscan concept of the banquet evolved considerably as foreign versions such as the Homeric and Near Eastern reclining banquets were encountered. In her discussion of banqueting in Central Italy, Annette Rathje states that many of the imports into Etruria beginning in the Orientalizing period consisted of dining ware. These were not just knick-knacks to be displayed on a shelf, but were used for specific occasions.¹⁷ These imported elements gave the Etruscans new ways to celebrate something already established in their culture along with new ways to depict it in their burials.

Evidence of the Etruscan banquet outside the funerary context has been found in the excavations of towns. For example, in the rural settlement of San Giovenale near Cerveteri a building thought to be a public building dating from c. 625 contained a mix of local and imported pottery with Etruscan inscriptions on some of the cups and bowls. Along with other remains, it

¹⁷ Annette Rathje, "The Homeric Banquet in Central Italy," *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposium*, ed. Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 280-83.

seems the building was equipped for dining and drinking, suggesting a possible site for public banquets.¹⁸ Banqueting is also shown in plaques found at Murlo and Acquarossa. Although typically assumed to be aristocratic gatherings, as yet there is no evidence proving this and it is as likely the plaques depict public ritual banqueting in which more than just the aristocracy would be present. Still, there is a fair amount of evidence from the excavations which suggest that banqueting was a common practice in at least some strata of Etruscan society.

Supporting the commonness of banqueting was the development of the stereotype of hedonistic and over-indulgent Etruscan. By the first century Diodorus Siculus considered the Etruscans to be the most extravagant of non-Greek people, so much so that the Sybarites, themselves “slaves to their belly” preferred to deal with them above all other barbarians (VIII.18). Around the same time the term “*pinguis Etruscus*” or fat Etruscan was used for rotund Romans of Etruscan descent who enjoyed good food.¹⁹ The fact that this stereotype existed at all in the first century meant that the feature it mocked was something unique and prevalent enough in Etruscan culture for the overgeneralization to occur in the first place.

Of course, banqueting was a common practice in many cultures. Surplus is the mark of a successful society, and agricultural the most common form of surplus. The way it is used helps define what is important to that society and because agricultural surplus cannot be hoarded for indefinite amounts of time, like precious metals and money, it is only valuable and can only be used within a short amount of time from its production. This use is subject to the ritual its social aspect demands, and the rituals which surround food use are too numerous to list. Suffice to say, the way Etruscans chose to ritualize their agricultural surplus was through banqueting.²⁰ One

¹⁸ Haynes, *Etruscan Civilization*, 85.

¹⁹ Nigel Spivey and Simon Stoddart, *Etruscan Italy* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1990), 62.

²⁰ Oswyn Murray, “Symptotic History,” in *Sympotica: A Symposium on the Symposium*, idem ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 4-5.

function of the banquet, of course, was to reinforce the position of the aristocracy, but based on funerary evidence this particular ritual seems to have filtered into a broader base of the population than just the aristocracy.

Differences in these rituals of banqueting are important, especially when comparing Etruscan to Greek banquets. At first glance the depictions of the two look very similar, especially since many different Greek vessels are used in Etruscan funerary art and Etruscan art styles were heavily influenced by Greek. Also, the Greek *symposion* was known in Etruria, as it is depicted in several tombs of the early fifth century.²¹ However, Jocelyn Penny Small gives two key differences which stand out between Etruscan and Greek: the presence of women, and the order of eating and drinking.²²

A Greek *symposion* generally took place in the *andron*, the men's room. The presence of women during the *symposion* was considered immoral and banned, with the exception of *hetaerae*, or courtesans.²³ There was a distinct and deliberate separation between eating and drinking. The food was ritually distributed and then consumed. It is the drinking after eating that took on elaborate rituals concerning most importantly the mixing of wine and water; only barbarians drank their wine unmixed. As early as the eighth century the Greeks started reclining at their banquets, most likely influenced by the Near East. This practice showed its influence in the organization of the *andron* and limited participation to around thirty persons at most.²⁴

Etruscan banquets, however, are quite different. First, eating and drinking are not separated, as is shown in several plaques and tomb paintings. The Shields tomb depicts one man

²¹ D'Agostino, "Archaic Etruria," 8.

²² Jocelyn Penny Small, "Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: Etruscan Banquets" in *Murlo and the Etruscans: Art and Society in Ancient Etruria*, ed. Richard Daniel De Puma and Jocelyn Penny Small (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 85.

²³ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁴ Murray, "Symptotic History," 6-7.

taking an egg from his wife, a table covered in food in front of them, whilst on an adjoining wall another couple is shown, the man drinking, with a similar table of food in front of them. In the Tomb of the Lioness a man holds a *kylix* in one hand and an egg in the other. The Golini I tomb shows two reclining figures holding *kylikes*, and on an adjacent wall food is prepared on trays. The reclining figures in the Murlo frieze hold drinking bowls and cups with tables of food in front of them.²⁵

The women of Etruscan banquets are also different from those depicted in the *symposia*. Athanaeus records Theopompus calling them wives who “dine, not with their own husbands, but with any men who happen to be present, and they pledge with wine any whom they wish.” (*Deip.* XII.517d) Although Theopompus casts these women in a negative light, it does help us to understand at least a bit the role of the wives in Etruscan households. We know that Etruscan women held a societal importance greater than did their Greek and Roman counterparts. It appears that in Etruscan hospitality etiquette a wife was perhaps required to maintain her husband’s honor in his absence.²⁶

Although their presence to the Greeks may have been scandalous, the women depicted in these banquets were decorous and fully dressed. Given that many of the depictions of men and women reclining together while dining were from tomb paintings, where family is all important, it can be reasonably assumed that the men and women were husband and wife rather than husband and mistress. Even in tomb paintings depicting a number of men and women dining together, the rules of decorum still apply, and it is possible that they represent expended family buried in the tomb all banqueting together.

²⁵ Small, “Etruscan Banquets,” 86.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 92, n. 39.

Not to say that the Greeks did not have formal banquets with husbands and wives; as Small mentions, depictions of these appear on votive stelae, but Etruscan banquets appear to be less formal. Nor did Etruscans fail to participate in more erotic and even homosexual forms of entertainment, as several depictions in tomb can relate. These depictions, though, are subordinate to the scenes of so-called regular life, and do not depict the matron of the household.²⁷ Thus, the differences between Greek and Etruscan banqueting are enough so that it can be determined that banqueting held different roles in the two cultures.

With this, I propose a third distinction between the Etruscan banquet and Greek *symposion* to those of Small, adding a context definition. A *symposion* was a separate gathering of men with its own rules dictating behavior in place of those of the larger society; these behaviors were not always acceptable in general society and in fact could completely contradict social conventions. Group loyalties were formed or enforced, and these loyalties played a part in the creation of *hetaireia*, a sort of fraternity which could include social ties. The *symposion* was a man's world, where the focus was on conviviality among the close group of men present. The *symposion* as held in Etruria was likely held for economic reasons, participating in Greek style of ritual with other Greeks in order to make needed connections, a typical function of the *symposion*.²⁸

Etruscan banquets, however, seem to have served a more inclusive than exclusive purpose and were most commonly depicted as being family oriented, although public banquets have also been displayed in friezes. Perhaps this is why banquets were depicted so much in a funerary setting, which has no Greek equivalent. Greek funerary tradition was not given to the

²⁷ Ibid., 87-89.

²⁸ Murray, "Symptotic History," 7.

“monumental graves, lavish grave goods, and tomb painting”²⁹ common to Etruscan funerary ritual, and the banquet, whether *symposion* or something more like a *convivium*, was not a part of Greek funerary tradition. *Symposia* were popularly depicted on vases but Etruscan banquets were rarely featured.³⁰ Anthony Tuck explains the prominence of banqueting, especially in a family context, in funerary representation as something that is logical in an aristocratic society which requires family stability and perpetuation, something at risk at the death of one of its members.³¹ Given the Etruscan emphasis on family even above city-state, this would make sense.

Banqueting in Central Italy is the central theme in Rathje’s discussion, specifically the appearance of the Homeric banquet in Etruria. Descriptions mentioned in Homer of royal Phoenician gifts in the form of banquet ware match items found in some of Central Italy’s richer tombs. In Homer there is little reason needed for banqueting beyond the joy of the banquet. Also, in the Homeric banquet participants sat rather than reclined, as did some of the earliest representations of Etruscan banqueting we have from the seventh century.³² Only later did the fashion change to a reclining banquet; this may have been part of a larger change in fashion which swept through the Mediterranean.

This evidence shows some of the fascinating influences on the Etruscan banquet. David Ridgway proposed that a Homeric way of life was adopted in Central Italy in the eighth century, and Larissa Bonfante commented that the world represented on the Montescudaio urn and in the Tomb of the Five Chairs, discussed below, “was the same world as the *Odyssey*” where the favored activity was the banquet celebrating the host’s “wealth, generosity, hospitality and

²⁹ Robert Leighton, *Tarquinius: An Etruscan City* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd., 2004), 113.

³⁰ Small, “Etruscan Banquets,” 87-89.

³¹ Anthony S. Tuck “The Etruscan Seated Banquet: Villanovan Ritual and Etruscan Iconography,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 98 (1994): 627.

³² *Ibid.*, 281-84.

influence.”³³ This is supported with items from cremation burials in Tarquinia also discussed below which contain objects depicted in the *Illiad* and date to the same period of time as these representations. Rathje proposes that banqueting in any style, be it Greek, Etruscan or Latin, was a cultural standard expressing the lifestyle of the aristocracy.³⁴ I agree that it was a cultural standard, although in Etruria it was not just an aristocratic practice. I also add that the Homeric banquet was part of a cult package which was brought into Etruria. Later, banqueting took on new features as other cult packages were introduced.

Given the emphasis on dining, it is obvious that it should appear in Etruscan funerary traditions if D’Agostino’s theory is followed. It is a theme that spans the variety of burial traditions practiced by each city-state. Iron Age burials contain early evidence of the importance of food in both burial practices and grave goods. Non-food related grave goods appear according to gender divisions but the same food items were found in both male and female graves, underscoring the more equal role women had in Etruscan culture as well as the universality of ritual dining which would again be displayed in later tomb paintings.³⁵ By the Orientalizing period burial practices had developed into inhumation in chamber tombs where several members of one family would be buried.

Among these more elaborate burials we can see the cosmopolitan tastes of the Etruscans. The Tomb of the Statues at Ceri contains statues in the style of North Syrian sculpture which represent the forefathers of the husband and wife buried there. The Regolini-Galassi tomb at Cerveteri contained opulent grave goods, some of Cypro-Phoenician origin and others also with North Syrian influence. Perhaps the best example of collection of exotic imports is the Tomb of

³³ Ridgway and Bonfante are both quoted in Rathje, “Homeric Banquet,” p. 280 and p. 285, respectively. Unfortunately, neither source is available to me at this time.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

³⁵ Leighton, *Tarquinia*, 50-52.

Bocchoris in Tarquinia. It is named for a faience situla inscribed with a hieroglyphic cartouche containing the name of Bocchoris, a pharaoh who ruled from 720-715. The tomb had been vandalized before it was excavated in the late nineteenth century, but what was left included the situla as well as faience bottles and a number of Phoenician faience figurines. Other more locally-made objects are present also: local impasto jars used during banquets for mixing water and wine, an amphora, and a jug and cup painted in Etruscan style but produced at Cumae.³⁶

Tomb painting is perhaps the most well-known type of burial tradition; although at first widespread with examples in Caere, Veii, Chiusi, Blera, and Orvieto, it was most popular in Tarquinia where eighty percent of all painted tombs have been found. Even in Tarquinia, however, tomb painting was not a common practice. About 180 painted tombs survive although there were probably more which became victims of time or vandalism, or were discovered but never recorded. Of the known surviving tombs, twenty-seven percent at the Calvario necropolis are painted, six percent at Arcatelle, and of the 6,000 tombs at Monterozzi, only three percent are painted.³⁷

At first this rarity comes across as an indication that painted tombs were solely aristocratic and banqueting as one of the most common themes found in the paintings would be an aristocratic practice. Instead, in ancient Italy craftsmen and painters were generally of low status and commissioning work from them cost less than fine grave goods. With this in mind, tomb paintings seem to have been more an expression of individuality than wealth, and banqueting not just an aristocratic practice. The largest chamber tombs were not painted at all and were most likely decorated instead with fine tapestries or other textiles which have not survived. In comparison, some of the smallest of all the Tarquinian tombs are painted: the

³⁶ Ibid., 74-80.

³⁷ Leighton, *Tarquinia*, 100.

Deceased tomb is only 2.5 meters square.³⁸ Other burial traditions echo this cross-class celebration of banqueting. In a trench tomb of a seventh-century woman in the Cannicella necropolis at Orvieto most of the grave goods were vessels for eating and drinking made in the local impasto style.³⁹ It is also likely that the Iron Age practices of placing grave goods in simple burials continued in the lower classes of Etruscan society even as the wealthier classes developed more opulent ways to bury their dead.

Greek items do appear to be more common since they are found in a wider range of burial types, very likely due to the larger number of Greek colonies in and around the Italic peninsula. The cremation tomb in Tarquinia mentioned above dated to about 675 and contained local pottery with Greek and Phoenician influences as well as imported pottery. This grave as well as several others in the area contained a little bronze grater, something that was more common in Iron Age Greece. These graters were referenced in the *Iliad* when Hecamede mixed a strong drink of wine with grated goat's cheese and barley in Nestor's tent (XI.615-44). Another tomb from the later seventh century contained a bench, table and sufficient pottery in a mix of local and Greek styles even after looting to set a banquet for about ten.⁴⁰

The Montescudaio urn, dated to around 650-625, had on its lid a seated banquet with two figures: one seated in front of a tripod table with a female attendant standing to the left of the seated figure. The next depiction, dated only slightly later, is found in the Tomb of the Five Chairs in Cerveteri. Reconstructed by F. Prayon, five terracotta figures, three male and two female, were placed in stone square-cut thrones and two carved stone rectangular tables were placed in front of the thrones. Also reconstructed were a large basket and a libation table, as well as a base for two more cylindrical thrones to the left of the squared thrones. These figures were

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Haynes, *Etruscan Civilization*, 146.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 59-64.

shown in a ritual pose, left arm beneath a cloak and right arm extended upward, palm upturned. These seem to have been produced specifically for funerary purposes.⁴¹

From the flourishing period of tomb paintings in the late sixth century on, banquet scenes occur in various settings. In the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing from the late sixth century an intimate portrayal of a family gathering is shown. The husband and wife gaze at each other while the husband holds a bowl and are prominently placed in the middle. They are attended by a flute player, served wine by nude serving boys, and two daughters sit nearby making garlands. This reinforces the importance of family in the funerary as well as banqueting tradition, another important theme which dates back to Iron Age burials. The Tomb of the Leopards from the early fifth century shows a larger gathering, young well-dressed couples reclining together in sumptuous and decorative surroundings, being served drinks; at least one figure appears to be holding an egg.⁴²

Later painted tombs show a shift from outdoor banquets to a more symbolic setting, incorporating underworld imagery into the traditional scenes. Greek imagery dominates the underworld depictions, though Etruscan underworld figures are also present. The Tomb of Orcus is a family tomb depicting a banquet with demons joining the banqueters; elsewhere throughout the tomb are images of Cerberus, Sisyphus, Hades and Persephone, and the Elysian Fields with Theseus, Ajax, Agamemnon and Tiresias. The depiction of food itself in the tomb paintings is usually not detailed with the exception of eggs in the hands of banqueters. In some paintings tables are piled with fruit and cakes, but little effort is made to provide detail and it is likely that detail was simply not needed. If so this lack of detail indicates that the significance lay not so much in the kind of food that was present but in that food was present at all. As

⁴¹ Tuck, "Etruscan Banquet," 617-18.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 105-108.

Massimo Pallottino points out in his introduction to *Etruscan Painting*, tomb painting “directly concerned the dead man” and displayed a “deliberate preference for the concrete and contemporary, manifested in scenes from everyday life.”⁴³ These banquets do not seem to have required any particular food item, further indicating that the importance of the depiction lay in the banquet and banqueters.

However if it is just the presence of food that matters rather than specific foodstuffs, then what of the egg which appears so often? It could be argued that eggs represent fertility which is somewhat logical in an aristocratic, kinship-oriented society when a member of the bloodline died, but in the Etruscan funerary context this interpretation just does not fit. It is far more likely that eggs were simply a part of the banquet, similar to what was illustrated by the common Roman phrase “from egg to apples” which described quite literally the order of the meal from beginning to end. Although Etruscan banquets may not have followed the order of Roman dining in that respect⁴⁴ the eggs were probably meant to be depicted as actual food objects rather than symbols.

Curiously, the presence of food is not found where it would normally be: with Persephone, in the Tomb of the Orcus. Even as underworld imagery became more prevalent in the paintings it remained concrete. Pallottino states that this indicated that the dead now inhabited a “Land of the Shades” rather than the tomb itself⁴⁵ and Nigel Spivey proposes that it is just a change of artistic style from a banquet in honor of the deceased leaving to make the journey to underworld to a banquet honoring the arrival of the deceased in the underworld.⁴⁶ It

⁴³ Massimo Pallottino, *Etruscan Painting*, trans. M.E. Stanley and Stuart Gilbert, *The Great Centuries of Painting* (New York: Skira, Inc., 1952), 11.

⁴⁴ Larissa Bonfante, “Daily Life and Afterlife,” *Etruscan Life and Afterlife: A Handbook of Etruscan Studies*, idem ed., (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 86 contains a short discussion of the order of courses within the meal.

⁴⁵ Pallottino, *Etruscan Painting*, 12.

⁴⁶ Spivey and Stoddart, *Etruscan Italy*, 119-20.

is likely that both could to an extent be true. Because of the presence of these banquets in the underworld, the deceased has no need for the pomegranate; the funerary banquet is enough to tie him to the dead lands, a place as concrete and real to the Etruscans as the lands of the living.

To further assess these images, though, there is still much about the Etruscans which needs to be explored. There is precious little information available on the actual foodstuffs consumed, since most related discussions focus on the agricultural practices especially as related to the famed engineering feats of the Etruscans. There is also little in the way of studies on banqueting itself; discussions are mainly tucked away within sections of more comprehensive overviews. Although excavations themselves may find remains from all levels of Etruscan society, available published material tends to focus on the aristocratic elements and fine burial goods, relegating the common to scant references if it is mentioned at all. A study of the Etruscan presence outside of Etruria would also be beneficial, as this would further establish the place they held within the ancient Mediterranean world.

Although we can only explore so far, there are several things which can be said about the Etruscans. Following D'Agostino's theory, food and dining is something which the Etruscans felt was important in their own society to consistently include in their grave goods and funerary images since the Iron Age. During the Orientalizing and Archaic periods, new methods of celebrating this theme were introduced from the Near East and Greece, including various styles of the banquet. As the bustling economy grew alongside the Etruscan presence in the Mediterranean, new styles of diningware were also introduced. The Etruscans did occasionally use these new diningware styles to participate in foreign banqueting rituals such as the Greek *symposion* but more often than not simply used them in Etruscan style alongside locally made wares.

From this, we can see that the emphasis in funerary ritual on food and dining was an Etruscan emphasis, rather than a foreign influence. The foreign elements and styles found in Etruscan funerary imagery and burial goods were not placed there because the Etruscans adopted styles somehow culturally superior to their own, but because the Etruscans used them to express their own cultural traditions. As seen through the study of food and dining in Etruscan funerary ritual, the Etruscans were a cosmopolitan people who integrated their distinct cultural identity into the larger Mediterranean world as they flourished along with the Greeks, Phoenicians, and other peoples with which they interacted.

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