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## Abstract

Prior to the rise of the Roman Empire the Etruscan people were the dominant political and cultural force of western central Italy. The Etruscans were not united as one nation but were rather a confederation of cities and territories with a shared culture. Despite this shared culture the Etruscans did not have homogenous burial practices. While within individual cultures some variation in funerary practice is not uncommon, the heterogenous nature of Etruscan burials is singular. Not only did burial types differ between cremation and inhumation, but the Etruscans also utilized different types of grave markers, tomb construction, and funerary decoration across both geographic regions and time periods. Examining the socioeconomic development of Etruscan cities in relation to changes in funerary architecture and ritual practices can shed light on these diverse practices. Investigating this phenomenon reveals not only how certain practices may have developed in cities, but also how the Etruscans interacted with other Mediterranean cultures as well as how they communicated amongst themselves. This paper will explore this relationship through the examination of the of Banditaccia Necropolis in Cerveteri, Italy and the Necropoli Etrusca del Crocifisso del Tufo in Orvieto, Italy.

*Keywords:* Etruscan, Necropolis, Funerary Archaeology, Italian Archaeology

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## **Introduction**

Prior to the rise of the Roman Empire the Etruscan people were the dominant political and cultural force of western central Italy. The Etruscans were not united as one nation but were rather a confederation of cities and territories with a shared culture. Despite this shared culture the Etruscans did not have homogenous burial practices. While within individual cultures some variation in funerary practice is not uncommon, the heterogenous nature of Etruscan burials is singular. Not only did burial types differ between cremation and inhumation, but the Etruscans also utilized different types of grave markers, tomb construction, and funerary decoration across both geographic regions and time periods. Examining the socioeconomic development of Etruscan cities in relation to changes in funerary architecture and ritual practices can shed light on these diverse practices. Investigating this phenomenon reveals not only how certain practices may have developed in cities, but also how the Etruscans interacted with other Mediterranean cultures as well as how they communicated amongst themselves. This paper will explore this relationship through the examination of the of Banditaccia Necropolis in Cerveteri, Italy and the Necropoli Etrusca del Crocifisso del Tufo in Orvieto, Italy.

## **Early Etruscans and International Relations**

The Etruscans appear as a distinct culture in the northern regions of the Italian peninsula at the beginning of the first millennium BC, most likely evolving from the Villanovan culture as power centers nucleated and proto-urbanization began. The Etruscans were active

traders and cultivated profitable relationships with peoples across the Mediterranean and Europe. These international contacts allowed the Etruscans to become a major trading power and heavily influenced the development of Etruscan culture. Significant socioeconomic consequences also went along with the Etruscan's increased contact with other peoples. The creation and maintenance of trade relations as well as the import of foreign goods and ideas helped to give rise to an aristocratic upper class which appropriated foreign motifs and objects as a means of advertising their own wealth and growing power, especially in their funerary architecture.

Etruria's early rise to prosperity was largely due to the regions rich deposits of ore which were exploited and smelted into high quality bronze and eventually became central to the iron trade as well (MacNamara 12). The early exploitation of these mineral resources enabled the proto-Etruscan population to develop greater socioeconomic complexity and to nucleate into proto-urban population centers by the ninth century BC (Tuppi 48). Early major centers of urbanization include the cities of Veii, Cerveteri, Tarquinia, Vulci, and Orvieto (arguments may also be made for Chiusi). These cities and their territories developed strong regional identities which influenced their art and culture significantly.

During the eighth century BC Etruscan domestic and foreign trade strengthened and Etruscan culture began to hybridize with the cultures of Greek colonists, traders, and immigrants. It is from the Euboean Greeks at Pithekoussai that the Etruscans received one of their most valuable assets: an alphabet, which the Etruscans quickly repurposed for their own non-Indo-European language, a prime example of hybridization (Giuliano Bonfante and Larissa

Bonfante 52). Use of the Greek alphabet spread rapidly through the peninsula, with evidence for its use appearing nearly simultaneously in both the coastal and inland cities (Giuliano Bonfante and Larissa Bonfante 30). This provides compelling evidence of the Etruscans infrastructure and capabilities with internal communication amongst city states. Trade throughout the Orientalizing and the early Archaic Periods of Etruscan history enriched Etruria (particularly Southern cities) both economically and artistically, with coastal cities developing greater wealth earlier than their inland neighbors. The differences in economic prosperity and foreign influence over time and regions helped create the multitude of funerary architectural styles across Etruria.

### **Cerveteri, Banditaccia Necropolis**

The Etruscan city of Cerveteri was one of the earliest cities in Etruria to prosper. Its position in the south of Etruria, close to its port of Pyrgi, as well as its proximity to the mineral rich Tolfa Hills helped bring wealth to the city early (Dennis 238). The influx of wealth spurred on the development of an aristocratic class. As wealth increased a curious thing began to happen in Cerveteri's cemeteries. Gradually the Villanovan style cremation burials occurred with decreasing frequency and *fossa* type burials, or trench burials, began to appear. These were inhumation burials in long low trenches which contained the body of the deceased as well as small collections of grave goods and some had niches in which the remains of funerary banquets have been discovered. The grave goods and banqueting equipment, particularly sets of drinking paraphernalia, indicate that at least the wealthier deceased of the community were buried with certain ritual gestures.

By the seventh century fossa tombs with bronze and ceramic grave goods were no longer sufficient for the local aristocratic population. They required a more conspicuous way to display their wealth and sociopolitical standing within the community. They achieved this in two ways. First, by adopting the Orientalizing artistic style and using its restricted availability and expense to symbolize their wealth and power in the community (Morris 148). The second way they displayed their wealth was by adopting monumental tomb types. Early monumental tombs like the tumuli in Cerveteri's Banditaccia necropolis first appeared in the late eighth century BC further to the south in Campania at the city of Cumae, one of the earliest cities on the Italian peninsula (outside of Magna Graecia) to come into contact with the Greeks. It is theorized that Greek settlers in the area introduced the idea of monumental tombs to the local population where it was emulated by the very wealthy. From Cumae monumental tomb types appear to have spread north towards Cerveteri.

Much of Cerveteri's wealth was the result of trade with the Greeks and Phoenicians. This trade also introduced the Orientalizing style, discernible in new decorative motifs (such as exotic and mythic animals like griffins, rosettes, vegetal, and solar-lunar motifs) found on jewelry and architecture. Of all of the Etruscan cities, Cerveteri maintained the best relationships with its foreign contacts. It was one of only two Etruscan cities to have a treasury at the sanctuary of Delphi in Greece, there was a sizable immigrant population in Cerveteri's port city of Pyrgi, and in the fourth through the second centuries BC Cerveteri had the most amicable relations of any Etruscan city with the growing Roman State (Bonfante 47). The maintenance of these relationships helped the city maintain steady economic prosperity

throughout most of its history. Ultimately archaeological evidence suggests that economics were a more powerful influence on tomb types than religion. Monumental religious architecture appeared in Cerveteri at least a century later than monumental tombs, the appearance of which coincides with the beginnings of the city's economic boom (Murray 210). Etruscans at Cerveteri also appear to have been receptive to foreign social and religious practices as well as immigrants. There are several compelling pieces of evidence which support such claims.

In Pyrgi three golden tablets were found with a bilingual inscription written in Etruscan and Punic (the language of the Carthaginians). The tablet was a dedicatory offering made by an Etruscan man, Thefarie Velianas, in the sixth century BC to the Phoenician goddess Astarte who appears to have been associated with the Etruscan goddess Uni (Giuliano Bonfante and Larissa Bonfante 68). The presence of the inscription implies that Cerveteri had close ties with Carthage during this period and either enough Etruscans had begun to worship the goddess to justify the creation of a sanctuary to her or that there was a large enough population of Phoenicians and Carthaginians within Pyrgi who worshipped Astarte to warrant the building of the sanctuary. Either way the presence of the sanctuary and inscription demonstrate Cerveteri's openness to adopting foreign ideas.

As far as immigration goes there is substantial evidence in Cerveteri's art that Greek artisans were present in Cerveteri and had established workshops in and around the city. Pottery and painting workshops were established by Greek immigrants to the area who brought their native styles from Ionia, Corinth, and eventually Attica, to Etruria. Recall the Aristonothos

Krater discussed earlier. Greek painters also began to apply their skills to the interiors and perhaps even the exteriors of the new monumental tumuli which gained popularity in Cerveteri during the seventh century. The Tomba delle Lastre Dipinte, one of the earlier Etruscan tombs discovered with interior painted scenes, shows clear Ionian and Greek influences which many scholars believe indicate that the artist was a native of Greece (Dennis 259).

In the sixth century a new tomb type appeared in Cerveteri. Dado tombs (also known as cube tombs or dice tombs) are chamber tombs which, as the name implies, were constructed in the shape of cubes. Dado lacked the ostentation of tumuli. Their exteriors were more or less uniform and there was no opportunity for one family to build their tomb larger than another because sections of dado tombs appear to have been built at the same time and then their chambers sold to various aristocratic families (Oleson). This dramatic shift in tomb construction occurred at a time where the economic future of Cerveteri was uncertain. During the sixth century Etruria experienced a harsh decline in their naval dominance in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Etruscan ships were involved in scuffles and full naval battles with their competitors, the Phoenicians and the Greeks. Because Cerveteri's economy and by extension the power of its aristocratic families was so dependent upon trade the city experienced social and economic uncertainty. The creation of dado tombs and the more egalitarian front that they created may have been the aristocratic class' attempt to conserve their wealth and public image in the city. It must be kept in mind that even though the dado tombs are often interpreted as a sign that Cerveteri's society was more egalitarian at the time, these tombs were still only available to the

wealthy citizens of the city and do not reflect how lower- and middle-class citizens buried their dead.

Cerveteri was able to experience a resurgence in the fourth century. Though the Etruscans were no longer a naval power, Etruria was still a vital market for Greece and Carthage. The use of dado tombs declined and tumuli and elaborately decorated chamber tombs became the common tomb types used by wealthy citizens up until the city became a part of the growing Roman State. Cerveteri's relationship with Rome in the last few centuries of its existence were crucial to the continued success of the city by the late third and second centuries BC. Unlike many other Etruscan cities which actively antagonized Rome, Cerveteri created treaties and peaceful agreements with Rome. The Romans considered Cerveteri to be a cultural hub and Roman elite would often send their sons to be educated there. One of the best pieces of evidence which displays the relationship between the Etruscans at Cerveteri and the Romans comes from Livy's accounts of the history of Rome. During the sack of Rome in 390 BC Cerveteri provided sanctuary to the Vestal Virgins and their sacred objects until it was safe for them to return to Rome (Mellor 172). Eventually the relationship between the two cities culminated in Cerveteri being absorbed into the Roman Republic.

### **Orvieto, Crocifisso del Tufo Necropolis**

In addition to coastal cities such as Tarquinia and Cerveteri, it is necessary to analyze inland Etruscan cities like Orvieto in order to understand how geographic location impacted funerary practices and architecture. The modern city occupies the same tufa mesa upon which the ancient Etruscans lived, preventing archaeologists from studying the living spaces of the

Etruscans here. Researchers also encounter problems while attempting to study the cemeteries which lay at the base of the mesa. Though two sites have been excavated and are even open for public visitation, there is a dearth of information from the excavations themselves. Poor record keeping, methodology, as well as the presence of more alluring cemeteries further to the South have created a disparity in information; far fewer studies have focused on Northern Etruscan cemeteries than their Southern counterparts (Oleson 204). This leaves less for scholars to work with until additional studies can be done or past excavations re-examined.

Orvieto, like most other Etruscan cities in Etruria, began as a Villanovan settlement and the people used the standard biconical geometric urns for their burials. During the Orientalizing Period, Orvieto did not prosper like coastal cities managed, due to its inland position it did not have easy access to ports though the city did have land-based trade routes and could also be reached by the then navigable Paglia River. Few burials from this time have been published though there is evidence that fossa tombs were occasionally used (Bizzari). Because Orvieto had established overland trade routes early in its history which were not dependent upon the maritime trade from the coastal cities, it was spared the worst of the economic fallout from the loss of Etruscan naval dominance in the Tyrrhenian Sea in the fifth century (Haynes 177). At this time a major shift in tomb types occurred in the Orvieto necropolis.

In the sixth century BC the necropolis Crocifisso del Tufo was built just outside of the city at the Northern base of the mesa. The necropolis is made up of rows of neatly ordered dado tombs, much like the ones at Cerveteri. However, there are several distinctive features of the Orvieto dado tombs which indicate that the tomb type was not copied wholesale from the

coastal city. Crocifisso del Tufo displays evidence that the necropolis was rigidly planned. The layout is entirely regulated and the tombs themselves are all of approximately equal size. The tomb interiors are all fairly plain, most consist of bare walls with rock carved benches for the placement of bodies and urns. The exterior decorations on the facades of the tombs are minimal and show even less variety than what may be found on Cerveteri's dado tombs (Oleson 214). All of these factors indicate that there was an organized effort, possibly by a magisterial or priestly office, to regulate and oversee the construction, expansion, and maintenance of the cemetery. The standardized nature of the tombs may suggest that at the time, Orvieto (like Cerveteri) was attempting to restrict ostentatious displays of wealth by the city's aristocracy. Sumptuary laws may have been put in place in order to create a more egalitarian environment.

It is difficult to determine why the layout of Crocifisso was so painstakingly maintained. Space was not a likely issue. The land surrounding Orvieto consists of both flat valley floor as well as nearby hillsides. Other Etruscan cemeteries are located in places such as these meaning that there was not a cultural taboo against placing cemeteries in these locations. If anything, there seems to have been greater efforts to move cemeteries further away from city walls. The close proximity of Crocifisso to the living city at Orvieto is an exception to what appears to have been a general cultural rule. Perhaps the proximity of the necropolis to the living city provides some insight into the rigid planning that occurred at Crocifisso del Tufo. The necropolis is very intentionally set up to resemble the cities in which the Etruscans lived. Cities were an important institution for the Etruscans. The movement of the Etruscan people into urbanized areas marks

(for scholars) the beginning of Etruscan culture. For the Etruscans themselves the creation of cities began a time of great prosperity, international relations, and territorial expansion. Lucy Shipley even proposes that the Etruscan's chosen name "Rasenna" may be translated as "People of the City" (Shipley 118). The prevalence of the city in Etruscan life may have encouraged the people of Velzna to place their city of the dead closer to the city of the living in order to juxtapose the two institutions. Perhaps they believed burying their dead in cities of their own may help the deceased retain some level of agency after death.

Another aspect of Crocifisso which supports the idea that there may have been some interest in restoring a degree of agency to the deceased are the carefully inscribed names on the lintels of the entrances to each tomb. The diligent recording of the names of the tomb owners is unique to Orvieto during the Archaic period (Giuliano Bonfante and Larissa Bonfante 27). Other cemeteries may have had inscriptions on cippi or even on grave goods bearing the name of the deceased, however nowhere are the names so prominently displayed on the tombs themselves or consistently recorded during the period as Crocifisso del Tufo (Giuliano Bonfante and Larissa Bonfante 14). The names themselves are interesting. Some of the names indicate that individuals of Faliscan, Celtic, Sabine, and Umbrian origin were buried at Crocifisso alongside Etruscans (Haynes 146). This apparently multi-national cemetery is an astounding departure from the segregation of foreigners from native Etruscans which was carried out at Tarquinia and Cerveteri. It is possible that the egalitarian nature of the dado tombs at Crocifisso more accurately reflect the social climate of Orvieto than the dado tombs at Banditaccia reflect the social climate of Cerveteri.

From the Archaic Period onward Orvieto enjoyed steady prosperity due to its trade connections and bronze workshops. By the third century BC the city was one of the most important producers of fine bronze works in Etruria (Haynes 178). It does appear that a aristocracy or at least a wealthy class existed in the city. Interestingly evidence for their existence comes from outside of the city itself and its main necropoli. The Golini Tomb is one of the few painted tombs discovered thus far in the vicinity around Orvieto. The tomb resembles those found at Tarquinia. It is a simple carved chamber tomb created in the third century BC with frescoes decorating the walls. The frescoes themselves provide unique insight into the lives of upper-class Etruscans during the period. Painted on the walls of the tomb are a host of servants preparing a fine meal for two reclining figures who have been identified as Aita and Phersipnai, the Etruscan equivalents of the Greek deities Hades and Pershephone. The scene is a compromise between the older style of Etruscan painting which focused on life scenes and banqueting and the newer style which spread during the fourth century BC which focused on the Underworld.

The lighthearted subject matter (lighthearted when compared to the scenes in the Tomb of the Blue Demon in Tarquinia) may indicate that the inhabitants of Orvieto did not feel the foreboding of the future as strongly as their coastal counterparts, which is ironic because the downfall of Orvieto came much sooner and much more definitively. A social revolution ended in destruction when the nobility of Orvieto requested Roman aid in retaking the city from their rebelling enfranchised slaves. Rome lay siege to the city and it fell in 264 BC. The city

was then abandoned when population was forcibly moved by the Romans to the less defensible shore of Lake Bolsena (MacNamara 167).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is demonstrable archaeological evidence indicating that a driving cause of the diversity in Etruscan funerary architecture was the asynchronous socioeconomic prosperity of Etruscan cities. At Cerveteri, the tumulus acts as a symbol of aristocratic wealth and power while the dado tombs developed in response to a period of economic decline as a means of memorializing the dead in a less conspicuous manner. On the other hand, the lack of aristocratic tumuli and the presence of uniform dado tombs at Crocofisso del Tufo in Orvieto symbolize a greater sense of egalitarianism and individualism in a city that had a later rise to power and prosperity. The unique identities of Etruscan cities is closely tied to their funerary architecture, which changed to reflect the needs of the communities they served. In the search for Etruscan identity, the importance of funerary architecture is difficult to overstate, nevertheless there is still much to learn, both from well known necropoli as well as sites as of yet undiscovered.

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