



The Etruscan Woman: 'Romanization' and Funerary Culture

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This paper evaluates our knowledge of Etruscan women during the Hellenistic period (c. 325–31 BC). This subject is complex for two main reasons: firstly, the lack of Etruscan literary sources and secondly, the Roman conquest of Etruria. Giving primacy to the role of female material culture, the societal status of the Etruscan woman is scrutinized through analysis of the ratio of male to female names in Etruscan epitaphs. This aspect is diachronically studied for Chiusi, gauging the possible impact of both internal and external developments. This paper explicitly rejects the old paradigm of pervasive 'Romanization', by not a priori assuming strong Roman influence in the social sphere. Instead, Etruscan developments within a broader Italic context are seen as the basis for this analysis. Finally, this paper argues that there is no such thing as 'the Etruscan woman'. Rather, Etruria consisted of many subcultures with their own customs and modes of representation.



Introduction

The Etruscan woman has become an enigmatic entity over the years; for a long time, she was the prototype of the emancipated woman, a feminist *avant la lettre* (Figure 1).¹ This made her a most interesting figure for modern scholars both in favour of, and also against, women's rights. Etruscan women were also frequently used by the Romans themselves to show how a good Roman woman should not behave. The legends of Tanaquil, Tullia, and eventually Lucretia's rape are probably the most obvious examples. Since the mid-twentieth century, however, the interpretation of Etruscan society has seen much revision and the formerly perceived chasm between Etruscan and Roman structures is now greatly nuanced (e.g. Bonnard et al. 2017; Amann 2017b).



Figure 1: Second century BC Etruscan urn from Chiusi (Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, 1896 (96.9.223a, b), CC0).

Onomastic elements — such as the metronymic or female *praenomen* — have played an important role in first emphasizing and then nuancing the prominent role of the Etruscan woman. These name formulae are mostly derived from funerary contexts, often the sarcophagi and urns themselves, but also grave goods. However, the associated tombs and burials are often ignored. Crucially, Nielsen (1989) analysed the average ratio of men and women in Hellenistic burials, but our knowledge of the relevant funerary culture has vastly improved in the past three decades. Kaimio (2017; 2022) and Krämer (2022), for instance, have provided further results for Tarquinia and its territory and Perugia. However, the material of Chiusi — the most plentiful in epigraphic terms among all Etruscan centres — has not been studied in this manner.

The cliché of the exceptional Etruscan woman remains a topic of much interest within research into Etruscan society. The assumption that the status of these women declined after the Roman conquest of Etruria is important within this narrative (e.g. Hadas-Lebel 2004: 205; Irollo 2004: 102–105; Rathje 2007). Etruscan culture did see important transformations in the Hellenistic period, mainly the loss of political sovereignty. However, change was a constant factor in the Etruscan region, also before the advent of Rome. In this respect, military conflicts between Etruscan polities, developing political institutions, and the economic integration of the broader region proved to be important factors. Crucially, Etruria was a large and diverse region, within which cultural identity was mainly focused on separate communities and lineages, rather than some overarching ‘national’ Etruscan sentiment. Given the variety of economic and social development, the aforementioned factors had variable effects depending on specific locations. As such, a nuanced approach to Etruria is necessary, investigating case studies in their own right.

By analysing the ratio of men to women in the epitaphs of Chiusi, a major city in modern Tuscany that is home to Etruria’s largest collection of epitaphs, and contextualizing this ratio within the associated funerary culture, I will examine the discourse surrounding women in one of the main centres of Etruria, and discuss potential implications for their experiences in daily life. In this paper, I argue that the funerary representation of the Etruscan woman informs us first and foremost about the way funerary culture was used in local communities. The predominant epigraphic paradigms played a crucial role in this regard and largely explain the different patterns in the Latin epitaphs of the region. As such, I suggest that the experiences of Etruscan women did not change drastically throughout the period under discussion. It is mainly their representation, tied to the overall sociocultural use of funerary culture, that was altered regularly. I will first discuss the theoretical outlook of the paper, taking into account the methodological challenges related to the external literary and internal

funerary perspectives. I will then set out my method for cataloguing and analysing the deceased discussed throughout this paper, making use of a custom database. The actual analyses consist of general averages for three cities (Chiusi, Tarquinia and Volterra) that will serve as a baseline, followed by a diachronic look at this gender ratio for Chiusi in particular, in order to gauge the potential impact of the Roman conquest. After a discussion of these results, I will present the most important implications for both our knowledge of Etruscan women and the role Rome may have played in terms of local gender relations.

Theoretical Background and Source Material

The External Perspective: Literary Sources and Cultural Paradigms

The study of Etruscan women is greatly complicated by several key problems, perhaps the most important of which is the lack of Etruscan literary sources. While we know the Etruscans produced literature (Becker 2020), no examples have survived. As a result, there are only Greek and Roman perspectives on the Etruscan woman and society. This is particularly problematic given the uneasy relation between Etruscans and Greeks on the one hand, and Etruscans and Romans on the other. Both relations were in part characterized by competition and friction, even if frequent cooperation and peaceful (economic) interactions certainly took place. Because of this, and their often moralistic and self-glorifying tone, these Greek and Roman texts cannot be taken at face value concerning the Etruscans (Izzet 2012).

This becomes especially clear when discussing the status and role of women, a controversial and ideological topic in Greek and Roman societies themselves (Amann 2000: 176). The Greek authors mainly depict the Etruscans as the proverbial ‘other’, used to define the Greeks and their (idealized) morals. This is how we should interpret polemic passages such as the one of Theopompus, preserved in Athenaeus (*The Learned Banqueters*, 12.517d–518b). Not only was Theopompus’ reliability disputed already in Antiquity (Amann 1999; 2000: 178–179), but he likely did not aim at a correct description of Etruscan society and its women. His goal was to ‘... define the Etruscans as barbarians of the West’ (Amann 2017b: 1112). To achieve this, he sketched Etruscan society as the exact opposite of the Greek one, characterized by polygamous marriages and unknown fatherhood, resulting in children being raised collectively.

This passage is not an accurate description, rather conveying a notion of lawlessness and lack of morality which Theopompus wished to associate with the Etruscans. While this passage has been criticized many times (e.g. Heurgon 1964; Pfiffig 1964; Amann 1999), it is still often assumed that there must be some truth to it, especially regarding

the (public) activities of the Etruscan woman. Potentially truthful aspects of the passage may concern, for instance, the participation of women in banquets as well as their role in the outward representation of the household.

Roman sources are much less critical of the Etruscan woman. As Rathje (2007: 19) and Amann (2017b: 1112) point out, the only relevant comments in this regard are those in Livy (1.57–59) — talking about the luxurious and inappropriate behaviour of the Etruscan women as opposed to the virtuous *exemplum* Lucretia — and the snide remark in Plautus' *Cistellaria* (561–563) where it is said that women can earn their dowry '... with [their] body, in a manner unworthy of [themselves], in the Tuscan way'. These passages indicate a stereotype of inappropriate sexual and luxurious behavior among the Etruscans, an image seemingly common in Rome.

The Etruscan woman was certainly an instrument for the Greeks to mock the Etruscans with, in the eyes of Greek readers, signalling that, in all likelihood, there was indeed some difference in social practices. This is perhaps best illustrated by the participation of married women in banquets, attested in (early) Hellenistic iconography (e.g. ash chests with reclining couples on the lid and tomb paintings: Amann 2018; Mitterlechner 2020). Roman authors usually describe Etruscan women neutrally or even positively at times. Only Tanaquil and Tullia stand out as powerful women overstepping their gender roles by meddling in politics (Livy, 1.34, 1.39, 1.47). Other than that, there are mainly similarities between Etruscan and Roman women, such as their presence at banquets and public spectacles. This explains the clear differences between Greek and Roman descriptions of Etruscan gender dynamics.

Turning to the modern reception of the Etruscan woman, notions of 'Romanization' have played a major part in this tradition. Nowadays, this concept is fiercely contested. The aim of this section is not to discuss this debate and its history at length,² but to show just how much Romanization and 'Hellenization' are entangled with each other in the case of ancient Italy. It is also important to emphasize that the role of Rome in these phenomena is far from straightforward. This has crucial implications for how local cultures and communities in Italy developed.

Both Romanization and Hellenization suffer from the same issue: they are *explanandum* and *explanans*, leading to circular reasoning. To quote Mattingly (2009: 285–286), 'What makes Romanization and Hellenization particularly unhelpful constructs is that the terms are being used to describe both process and outcome, so that the terms have become their own explanation'. This line of reasoning is particularly present within Romanization: 'Romanization' results in being 'Romanized' or 'Roman'. This creates the illusion of a very simple and easy-to-apply process of

‘Romanizing’ people. With Hellenization, focus is on a looser cultural process, without any forcible application in the case of ancient Italy. However, it still has political dimensions, as it can be used to support claims of superiority, especially in connection with Romanization.

Just as Hellenism does not necessarily indicate being purely Greek, but rather an amalgamation of Greek and eastern influences and cultural elements (Grimal 1975: 16), ‘Romanism’ was not solely Roman in nature but the outcome of centuries of interaction within and beyond Italy. Romanization cannot be seen as an exclusively Roman force. Rather, the culture associated with Romanization by modern scholars was a broad and vague whole of all kinds of Italic and Hellenistic forms, resulting in something predominated by Rome but not at all exclusively Roman. To quote Jiménez (2010: 57), ‘there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ Roman culture, because Rome and Italy were themselves trapped in a network of cultural references to the Hellenistic, Italic and Mediterranean worlds’ (cf. Woolf 1997; Hingley 2005: 55; Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 19–28, 73–143). It is typically impossible to reduce certain cultural developments to one single origin. This certainly applies to Italy, as it was a melting pot of several cultural influences, both Italic and external. Many of the trends attributed to Romanization can, therefore, be seen better in the light of broader Italic developments.

Roman influence throughout Italy was not all-reaching by the end of the second century BC but rather limited in socio-cultural terms. This should not come as a surprise, as such homogenization was never Rome’s intention to begin with. There was no self-evident trend towards Romanization, but Italic cultures did become more similar as time passed by. Local, particular forms were mixed with the Italo-Hellenistic universal, which could be seen as a shared cultural language from which localized ideas were drawn. Despite the evolution towards more homogeneity, people still selected particular mental and physical forms from this *koine* according to their own needs. It was only during the first century BC that many unique expressions of local culture disappeared within Italy, at varying speeds depending on the location and context (Roselaar 2019: 168).

Ultimately, it is not about a simple dichotomy between Etruscan and Roman, but rather about the interaction between elements that can be recognized as such by various groups. For the first century BC, typically Etruscan funerary culture is combined with Latin epitaphs, rather than all Etruscan forms being outright replaced when communities became Roman *municipia*. It is only during the first century AD that typical Etruscan funerary forms are replaced by monuments that can be considered Romano-Italic (Benelli 2023).

The Internal Perspective: Funerary Culture

In this paper, the focus lies on funerary culture as the outcome of negotiations and affirmations of societal norms (Morris 1992). It is used to study social categories and relations within (social) identities, also beyond the funerary domain. This revised view on funerary culture, focusing on underlying social and cultural factors determining funerary forms, has a basis in recent studies on Hellenistic Etruria (e.g. Roth 2013; Daveloose 2017). The death of a member of society represents a threat to existing social relations and ideals as a moment of discontinuity. However, it is also an opportunity to reaffirm and even manipulate these structures, according to current needs. Primary and secondary funerary rituals not only evaluate and memorialize the past but also shape the future. In these moments, individuals communicate personal and social identities in a public context. They do so driven by embedded factors — social norms, emotional relationships, and structural changes in society — and conscious manipulation of conventions. Funerary rituals and the related material culture are, therefore, not merely snapshots of how people wish to represent themselves and their loved ones, but also combinations of personal experiences and multiple processes of social identity formation (Chesson 2001). As a result, it is possible to deduce aspects of daily life from the funerary realm when this dimension is investigated in its proper context. While funerary culture is by no means a straightforward mirror of daily life, it does provide clues as to what underpins the rituals and material forms deployed for burials.

The investigation of late Etruscan women thereby finds itself at the crossroads of several theoretical considerations. We must be wary of outdated Romano-centric notions, both ancient and modern. At the same time, we cannot lose sight of the very real role material culture played in shaping opinions and behaviour. This entails investigating each community in its own right, letting go of imposed (cultural) borders.

To investigate the position of the Etruscan woman, this paper analyses one particular dimension of the funerary culture of Chiusi: the many epitaphs, in relation to the monuments on which these texts appear. A database was designed containing 2,431 epitaphs, sourced from *ET*², *CIE* and *CIL*). Each inscription was selected as long as it was an epitaph and consisted of at least a legible name (necessary to determine the gender of the deceased). These inscriptions belong to a wide variety of monuments, from elaborate sarcophagi to small clay urns. The materials used also vary in value, from alabaster to clay.³

The second edition of *ET* is an *editio minor* published in 2014, aimed at collecting all hitherto known Etruscan inscriptions. As such, it contains far less information than the monumental *CIE*, which is formatted similarly to its Latin counterpart (*CIL*). As *ET*² regularly contains questionable readings, lacks some Etruscan epitaphs and does not include Latin inscriptions from culturally Etruscan contexts, it is necessary to combine this edition with the other corpora. Both Etruscan and Latin inscriptions are included, as the Hellenistic period signalled the transition from the former to the latter for each Etruscan community, even if at different moments. As discussed above, the earliest Latin epitaphs of the region still belong to an Etruscan context in terms of funerary culture, which is why they are included here. A main point of investigation are the potential differences between both languages, possibly linked to various epigraphic habits and paradigms. The resulting numbers of epitaphs are: 1,486 Etruscan and 263 Latin epitaphs for Chiusi, 349 Etruscan and 163 Latin epitaphs for Tarquinia, and 147 Etruscan and 23 Latin epitaphs for Volterra. Tarquinia and Volterra serve as points of comparison regarding the average percentages.

For each epitaph, the gender of the deceased was recorded, resulting in four types: 1) male, 2) female, 3) uncertain, 4) multiple. The last category contains burials with more than one deceased, typically husband and wife. For the more detailed analyses, only the first two categories will be investigated. The gender of the deceased is typically determined on the basis of the name mentioned in the epitaph. The Etruscans had a limited number of *praenomina*, also for women (e.g. Ramtha, Hasti, Velia). In addition, the family name of women was usually characterized by a suffix typical for their gender, *-ei* (e.g. male Pulfna, female Pulfnei). Beyond onomastics, some (partly) illegible epitaphs could be attributed to women based on the style of the associated monument, e.g. when a female figure was reclining on the lid of the ash chest. This combined method leads to the identification of the gender of most burials with an epitaph.

It is important to note that Etruscan individuals will be considered either men or women. There has been much attention to gender identity among the Etruscans,⁴ and even more specifically for the at times opaque lines between male and female (e.g. Nielsen 1986; Bonfante 2009; Sandhoff 2009; 2011). However, this paper assumes a more straightforward approach, based on the names assigned to the deceased at birth. These names are associated with either men or women, with no overlap. This approach is generally supported by other indications of gender in the epigraphic evidence. Deceased in inscriptions are, when described with specific terminology, identified with the dichotomy male–female. Women can be described as *puia* (wife) or *sex* (daughter), while men are sometimes named as *clan* (son). The *nomina* of the deceased are at times

inflected in a genitive, either one typical for men or one typical for women. There are certainly several terms which could point towards a more fluid gendered identity, such as the *hatrencu* of Vulci (e.g. Lundeen 2006). However, at face value, the basic dichotomy of male–female seems justified for these kinds of large–scale analyses.

Dating inscriptions is a difficult business; in this particular case, dates are mostly based on stylistic analyses or association with a particular tomb. Scholars such as Thimme (1954; 1957) have long since created relative chronologies within tombs based on family trees, which were then connected to datable grave goods, often (imported) ceramics. Combined with stylistic analyses (e.g. Stevens 2001; de Angelis 2015), this has created a rough idea of the dating for types of monuments. Still, many of the epitaphs used in this paper are dated to a century or even a longer period. Palaeography is not very useful in this regard, as there is a great degree of homogeneity within the Hellenistic corpus of Chiusi, with most change happening before and after this period. For many epitaphs of the area of Chiusi, no specific date beyond the generic ‘recent period’ is possible. This equates roughly to the last five centuries BC, too broad an interval to be informative for this research. Therefore, these epitaphs — most of which I suspect actually belong to the well–documented second century BC — have been excluded from the analysis. By attributing some epitaphs to particular tombs — information often lacking in *ET*² — and by consulting scientific literature, it has been possible to date 844 epitaphs from Chiusi with more precision.

To turn these time intervals into legible graphs, they have each been converted into periods consisting of 25 years. For instance, an epitaph dated to the second century BC will cover four units of 25 years (200–176, 175–151, 150–126, 125–101). Next, each time unit is given a weight depending on the total number of units covered, in this case 0.25 for each unit. An inscription dated to the first quarter of the first century BC, will cover just one time unit (100–76) and will, therefore, have a weight of 1.00 for that specific unit. An epitaph dated to 50 years will cover two units, each with a weight of 0.50, and so on. This allows for the construction of a graph detailing change over time, as it spreads out broadly dated inscriptions over the associated time interval. Of course, a disadvantage of this method is the fact that within a broader interval (e.g. 200–101 BC), there might be a higher chance of the inscription belonging to time unit 200–176 than, for instance, the other three within this range, despite each unit being assigned the same weight. However, without a detailed investigation of each inscription and associated context, it is not possible to be more specific in attributing this weight. For now, this is a degree of generalization that has been made, hopefully to be refined in the near future.

Ratio of Men to Women

Average values

To properly contextualize the gender ratios belonging to the Hellenistic period, it is useful to briefly look at the patterns that were predominant in the preceding periods. In this regard, an interesting point of comparison is Amann's (2000: 93–103) analysis of Orientalizing epigraphy. For Etruria, there is not much material to go on, but the extant inscriptions paint a clear picture. Men predominate heavily over women, with Amann counting 120 male and only 40 female names among all types of inscriptions, many indicating possession or dedications. Among the first funerary inscriptions, this imbalance is even starker, with only a handful of female epitaphs in the Crocifisso del Tufo necropolis of Volsinii for the sixth and early fifth centuries BC (Amann 2000: 116). The whole notion of Etruscan society dominated by women in this earlier period is in no way backed up by the contemporary funerary evidence.

Turning to the Hellenistic period, the overall average gender ratio will be analysed before going into more detail and looking at Chiusi in a diachronic manner. These averages will provide a broader idea of the degree to which women were included in Etruscan epigraphic culture. Starting with the general average for the linguistically Etruscan epitaphs for Chiusi, Tarquinia and Volterra,⁵ men predominate in all three communities (**Figure 2, Table 1**). Chiusi shows averages of 55% for men, with women representing 43% of all inscriptions; the rest are 'multiple' burials or deceased of unknown gender.⁶ Tarquinia shows a similar result, with 58% for men. However, here the 'uncertain' category is substantially larger than for Chiusi, resulting in only 33% for women.⁷ For Volterra, the results based on Etruscan inscriptions alone are around 59% for men and 35% for women. Clearly, men are the preferred recipients of epitaphs, even if women are now much better represented than before the fourth century BC. In part, this predominance of men can be attributed to the age difference between husband and wife, causing men to typically predecease their wives, who in turn commemorate their husbands. Because of the high mortality of children and the importance of spouse-to-spouse commemoration, this must leave many widows without relatives or friends capable or willing to arrange a monumental burial with an epitaph for them. We must remember that it is also possible that a significant proportion of wives was buried in the container of their husbands without their own epitaph. So, while the imbalance between men and women likely has sociocultural causes, it is also partly determined by demographic realities (themselves also subject to social and cultural customs).

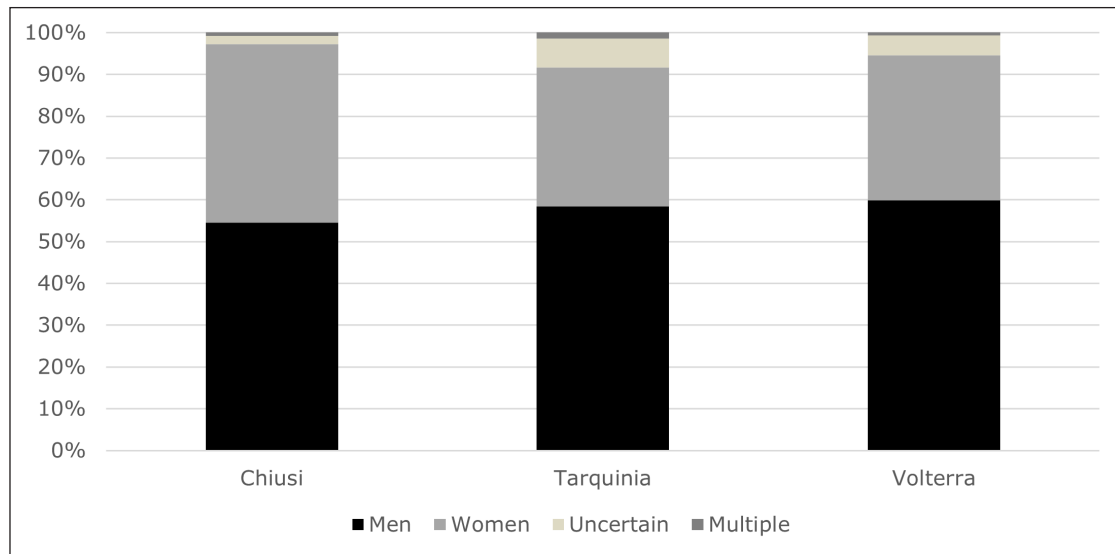


Figure 2: Distribution of all Etruscan epitaphs according to the gender of the deceased per city (325–1 BC) (Source: Author).

City	Men	Women	Uncertain	Multiple
Chiusi	810	635	29	12
Tarquinia	204	116	24	5
Volterra	88	51	7	1

Table 1: Absolute number of Etruscan epitaphs according to the gender of the deceased per city (325–1 BC) (Source: Author).

The results are, therefore, rather consistent across the case studies. Looking at Nielsen's (1989) results for other cities, however, there are some noteworthy exceptions. In Cortona and Arezzo, men predominate massively (85% and 75%, respectively) but the number of inscriptions is too low to be statistically relevant.⁸ Tuscania, on the other hand, gives a more balanced image, depending on the material involved. For stone sarcophagi with reclining figures, with or without inscriptions, there is a 50:50 ratio, the only instance in which women score similarly to men. For inscriptions on stone sarcophagi and *cippi*, there is a more expected 58% for men and 42% for women. Finally, terracotta sarcophagi yield 63% and 37% in Tuscania.

The higher proportion of males in the Tuscanian inscriptions on stone sarcophagi and *cippi* implies that the iconographic stone sarcophagi without inscriptions have a higher proportion of women, possibly higher than that of men. However, as the exact share of the *cippi* in Nielsen's data is not made explicit, we cannot know this for sure.

More recently, Kaimio (2017: 35) has analysed these *cippi*, determining that 33 (52%) belong to men and 30 (48%) to women. The terracotta sarcophagi — mostly dating to the second century BC — strongly favor men. In the more expensive materials, therefore, women feature about as much as men and even more so in the anepigraphic version of these monuments. For Nielsen (1989: 58), these results indicated that ‘Tuscanian families seem to have laid equal weight on the commemoration of all their family members, men and women, boys and girls’. However, it will become clear that this is only true for particular cases.

With its diverse range of funerary monuments, Tuscania does not fully follow the pattern discerned by Nielsen, which can be summarized as the ‘rule of availability’.⁹ Simply put, Nielsen (1989: 60) concluded that the more readily available a funerary form was, the higher the proportion of women was for that type of monument. While her results of both epigraphic and anepigraphic monuments across Etruria mostly justify this general rule, some nuances are in order.

Most notably, the relatively cheap terracotta sarcophagi contain significantly more male than female deceased in Tuscania, directly counter to Nielsen’s general rule. The implication might be that the people willing and able to spend more on funerary monuments were also more willing to give women a monumental burial. On the other hand, sarcophagi with inscriptions were even more expensive and here there is a predominance of men, indicating that above a certain price, women were deemed less worthy of the investment. The ‘rule of availability’, therefore, should perhaps be restyled as the ‘rule of ubiquity’: the more popular a particular funerary form was — for whatever reason — the higher the proportion of women in this medium. However, Perugia presents a notable exception, with a higher proportion of women in the epigraphic monuments compared to the anepigraphic ones (Nielsen 1985: 194). Still, men predominate clearly over women in Perugia as well. Limiting himself to family tombs with five or more epitaphs, Kaimio (2022: 75) counted 317 male and 175 female epitaphs, resulting in 64% for men and 36% for women. Ultimately, it is hard to pin down an exact pattern or ‘rule’, with significant variations existing across Etruria. Still, women typically feature more often on cheaper and more popular types of funerary monuments.

The general predominance of men over women in funerary culture provides us with clues to the status of Etruscan women within this realm. Women were seemingly not valued as much as men in this respect. If costly decisions had to be made about who was accorded a monumental burial, men were usually preferred, even more so for epigraphic monuments. While this does not necessarily indicate a lesser status for

women in daily life, it is clear that the funerary image of the Etruscan family was a predominantly male one. Men were seemingly the logical representatives of the family. Tomb composition was, despite considerable variation, mostly based on agnatic ties (Nielsen 1989: 85). Men were the almost exclusive founders of tombs, as my research (Daveloose 2022: 506–514, 689–707) has shown that there is only one certain case of a woman acting in this capacity (*ET*² Ta 1.108). Moreover, there is only one, highly uncertain, instance of a woman individually dedicating an epitaph (*ET*² Cl 1.796).¹⁰ While women may have arranged epitaphs often for their predeceased husbands, they mainly seem to have done so only in this very specific circumstance (i.e. the lack of a living husband or father with citizen rights to take up this responsibility instead). However, as only roughly a dozen funerary dedications can be identified for Etruria, it is clear that the vast majority of epitaphs did not explicitly mention those responsible for the monument. Mostly men were singled out in this capacity, but part of the many more ‘anonymously’ dedicated monuments could be linked to women, especially widows.

Overall, the matter of gender dynamics and the associated funerary discourse is a complex one. For instance, the use of the metronymic could be interpreted as a reference to maternal descent and even to the individual persona of the mother in the case of southern metronymics mentioning both *praenomen* and *nomen* (Daveloose 2023). This may have corresponded with more publicly present women in this area, as representatives of their families.

Language provides another way to analyse the ratio of men to women, comparing Etruscan to Latin. This also represents a diachronic axis, as Latin came to replace Etruscan. Generally speaking, women are less frequently represented in the Latin epitaphs (**Table 2**). For Chiusi, men make up 70% of all Latin epitaphs, with women represented in 25% of the inscriptions. Volterra shows a similar result: 67% for men and 24% for women. Tarquinia is somewhat of an exception, with 62% for men and 36% for women. For the latter case study, therefore, the difference with the Etruscan results is minimal, perhaps statistically insignificant.

City	Men	Women	Uncertain	Multiple
Chiusi	166	60	3	7
Tarquinia	101	60	1	1
Volterra	15	6	1	1

Table 2: Absolute number of Latin epitaphs according to the gender of the deceased per city (150 BC – AD 50) (Source: Author).

These results seem to give validity to Nielsen's (1989: 61–62) suggestion that Romanization¹¹ is one of the reasons behind the more limited commemoration of women, both in inscriptions and in epigraphic burials. Her results from Cerveteri — with 35% women in Etruscan and 26% women in Latin inscriptions — provide further evidence for this hypothesis. Supposedly, the Etruscan cultural identity weakened over time, which led to greater difficulty in maintaining the traditional burial forms. Under these circumstances, there would be a tendency to favour men over women in burial. This seems too simplistic, however, and Cerveteri certainly is a special case with its early close relations with Rome (going back at least to the Gallic sack of Rome in 390 BC). The number of epitaphs did decrease in most Etruscan centres during the first century BC (in Volterra by the end of this century), but this was probably caused by a change in the function of funerary culture rather than the loss of a cultural identity, as will be argued below. It makes no sense that the number of epitaphs would become so low due to supposed influence from Rome, where epitaphs were becoming more ubiquitous than ever before. It is not just a matter of exchanging an Etruscan for a Roman identity. Rather, there is a significant transformation of funerary and epigraphic culture. I argue that epigraphic language did play an important part in this development, but this has little to do with old notions of Romanization. Still, the link between language and epigraphy for the Etruscans needs further discussion, taking into account the quantitative development.

Development over time

An important question here is whether or not the global Hellenistic average obscures significant fluctuations over time, which could be linked to quantitative developments in epigraphic production. Looking at the data diachronically not only adds more detail and nuance to the discussion, but also enables a closer look at potential causes for observed changes. Focusing on Chiusi now, the Etruscan average mentioned earlier applies to most subperiods (**Figure 3**). There are some subtle differences between the centuries, however. The third century BC clearly gives higher proportions for men, around 65%, especially compared to the sparsely documented fourth century BC. Given the earlier suggested relation between availability and the gender ratio, the third century BC is a somewhat peculiar case. This century represents a clear increase in the number of epitaphs, building towards the peak of production during the second century BC. However, only towards the end of the third century BC does this increased availability result in higher proportions for women. A look at the social position of the families involved in these 'earlier' epitaphs reveals that this medium became more popular

among the elite first and that, within this social group, they were given to men rather than to women. It is only when inscriptions became abnormally numerous by ancient standards during the second century BC and spread among a larger segment of the population (Berrendonner 2004: 72; Benelli 2009: 305), that the proportion of women increased again and reached its all-time peak. Here, the ‘rule of ubiquity’ does apply. This is also the case for the first century BC, when production wound down and the proportion of women decreased somewhat.

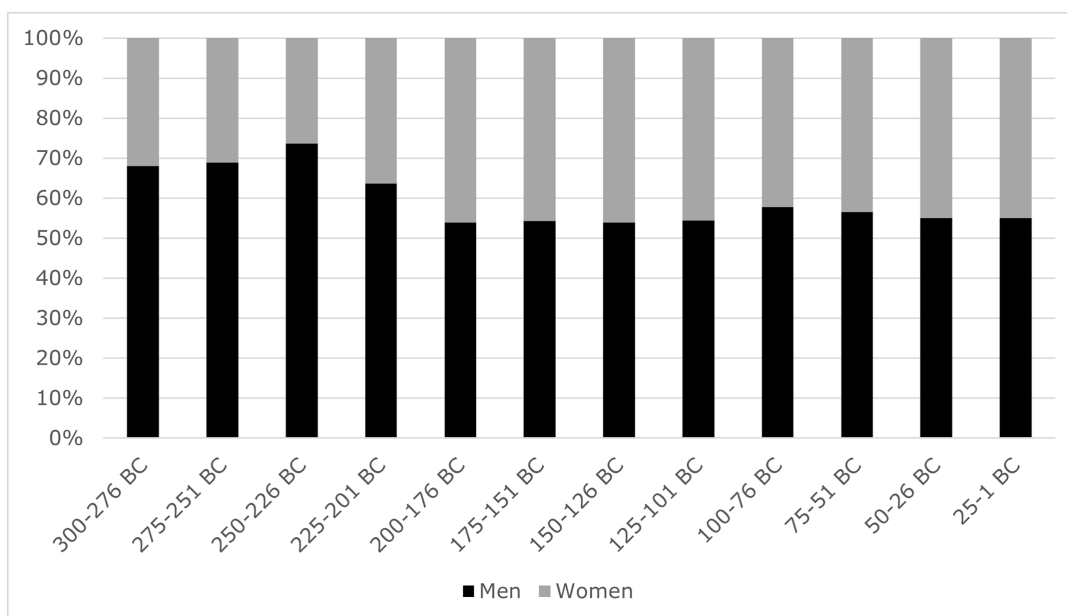


Figure 3: Evolution of the gender ratio in the Etruscan epitaphs of Chiusi (Source: Author).

The evolution of the gender ratio during the second century BC does show, however, that the relation between availability and the proportion of women is rather loose, only applicable up to a certain point. While the epigraphic production almost tripled during the beginning of the second century BC, the proportion of women increased by roughly 20% compared to fifty years earlier. The significant fluctuations in the absolute number of inscriptions translate into variances in the gender ratio only to a limited extent. A quick look at the absolute numbers of inscriptions for each time unit — again, spread out and weighted — shows the clear differences in overall production over time (Table 3).

The Latin inscriptions of Chiusi show a rather stable yet different image (Figure 4). The production of these inscriptions started at the beginning of the first century BC,

Gender	300-276	275-251	250-226	225-201	200-176	175-151	150-126	125-101	100-76	75-51	50-26	25-1
Men	15.71	13.16	28.64	75.09	184.54	133.04	135.46	143.09	32.14	23.27	10.28	10.28
Women	7.37	5.93	10.23	42.77	158.00	111.75	115.92	119.49	23.46	17.85	8.37	8.37

Table 3: Absolute frequency of Etruscan epitaphs of Chiusi (Source: Author).

with perhaps some inscriptions dating to the very end of the previous century (Maggiari 2014). The numbers for these inscriptions were consistent for the first century BC but decreased in the following century. The general observation of the higher male proportion for the Latin inscriptions of Chiusi holds, with some minor fluctuations. Generally speaking, men had a share of about 70–75%, while women represented 25–30% in most subperiods. The proportion of women is the smallest in the period of 25–1 BC, dropping to almost 20%. Weirdly enough, this is the period with the highest production of Latin epitaphs (Table 4). Looking at the joint production, however, the number of Etruscan and Latin epitaphs is the lowest for this subperiod of the first century BC. While this seems to uphold the hypothesis of availability, the proportion of women slightly increased again in the 50 years thereafter, when production was significantly lower; the opposite pattern would have to be expected according to the rule of availability.

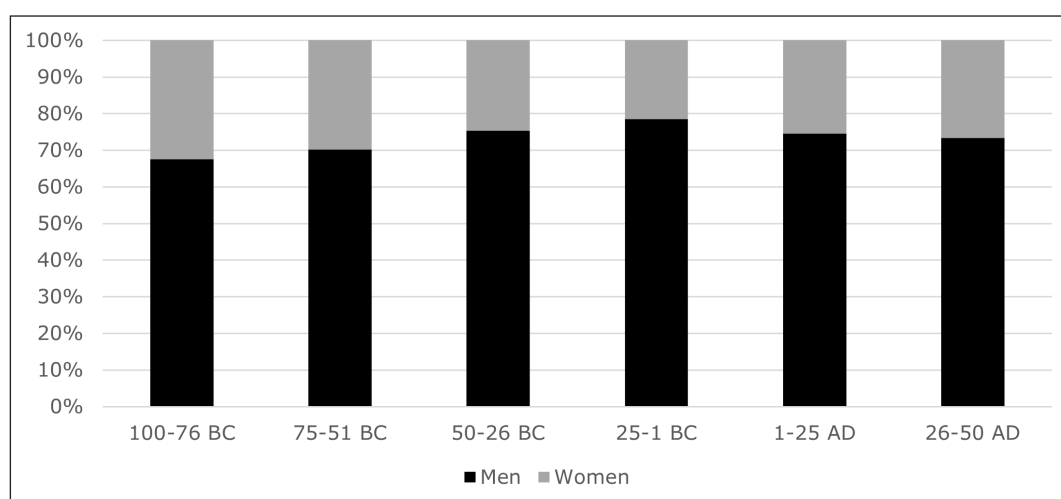


Figure 4: Evolution of the gender ratio in the Latin epitaphs of Chiusi (Source: Author).

Gender	100–76 BC	75–51 BC	50–26 BC	25–1 BC	1–25 AD	26–50 AD
Men	24.20	26.20	36.53	44.20	14.32	9.79
Women	11.62	11.12	11.96	12.12	4.87	3.54

Table 4: Absolute frequency of Latin epitaphs of Chiusi (Source: Author).

While in Chiusi there was a clear difference between Etruscan and Latin inscriptions and with that, a transition from one epigraphic culture to another, this contrast is much less stark in the case of Tarquinia, as previous research has shown (Daveloose 2022: 832–960). There is no clear mentality shift discernible in this southern centre in this

particular regard. The proportion of women in the Latin inscriptions was, for the first century BC at least, very similar to the average proportion in many Etruscan centres during the previous two centuries: around 60%. Therefore, there was much continuity regarding the gender ratio in Tarquinia, with some of the fluctuations best explained by changes in the production and the use of funerary culture, as will be outlined below. While the case of Chiusi suggests that the transition to Latin is automatically accompanied by lower proportions for women, the Tarquinian case demonstrates that these kinds of developments are actually very local in nature and depend on the specific circumstances of the funerary culture in question. Ultimately, Tarquinia subverts expectations, as this southern city is typically regarded as quickly Romanized and generally speaking more ‘Roman’ in nature than the northern communities.

Discussion

In explaining the general patterns of, and fluctuations in, the gender ratio of Chiusi, I argue that we should look for answers in the specific use of funerary culture by a particular society. A reduced cultural relevance of the funerary realm could lead to less competition and more inclusion. It may be exactly this dynamic that led to the large family tombs of the later third and mainly second and first centuries BC in Chiusi and also Perugia (cf. Kaimio 2022: 17–75). Earlier, funerary culture was focused on the representation of (elite) men and their accomplishments, rather than providing a broad medium for cultural and identity expression. As argued earlier, the notion that Romanization automatically leads to less consideration of women is problematic and Chiusi shows how the period after the conquest of Etruria witnessed the largest share of women in funerary culture.

The function of epitaphs is crucial here, given that they could and likely did change. The arena for acquiring social capital probably moved away from the funerary sphere — which was mostly private in the Etruscan case, with epitaphs typically placed in sealed-off tombs — to other, more public domains during the Hellenistic period. Funerary culture became increasingly less a realm to display status and establish distinction. This was part of an earlier transformation, which can be traced back to the early Hellenistic period. This change in function likely had major consequences for the people featured in this domain, as well as the way in which they were represented (Roth 2013; Daveloose 2017). As this use initially diminished, the proportion of women actually increased. Funerary culture became less competitive over time and, therefore, less dominated by men. Focus within funerary culture shifted, which allowed for a more prominent place for groups who were less involved with status display in the public sphere. The overall function and social use of funerary culture is, therefore, of great importance if we want

to understand the varying inclusion of particular groups, both in terms of gender as well as social status.¹²

Interestingly, the ubiquity of epitaphs seems to play a role in this as well, from more exclusive tools for commemoration to a much more available means to express family grief and identity. While the late third and second century BC were characterized by a stark increase in epitaphs in many Etruscan centres, the first century BC saw a strong decline in these numbers (Berrendonner 2004: 72); except for Volterra, where epitaphs were a much later phenomenon. Initially, (elite) men predominated in the more limited epigraphic production, as epitaphs were a new phenomenon, at least in terms of frequent use among more than just a small elite. Once epitaphs became more common, women were accorded one more often, as more intensive production and widespread adoption meant that people were not as selective in their epigraphic decision-making as before. Once production declined again as funerary traditions lost much of their overall sociocultural importance, the proportion of women diminished. Once more, epitaphs were used for a much more limited group, predominantly men.

While political events have been used to explain the fluctuations observed (cf. Krämer 2022: 197), such arguments are hardly convincing. The period of the major military defeats of the Etruscan cities to Rome, 350–250 BC, is characterized by a decreased proportion of women in Chiusi. In the later third century BC, this proportion increased and then stabilized. While it is possible that Chiusi first followed Roman standards — assuming that the proportion of women in Rome was small at this time — it is more likely that the aforementioned large-scale introduction of funerary epigraphy was first mainly associated with (elite) men and only later with women.¹³ After all, it seems illogical that the inhabitants of Chiusi would follow Roman customs during times of war but would abandon them once a peaceful status quo was achieved. Concerning the grant of Roman citizenship during the Social War (90 BC), there is actually much continuity in the Etruscan gender ratio compared to the quarters before and after.

Certainly, there is a correlation between societal structure and the male-to-female ratio in burials.¹⁴ More egalitarian societies result in relatively equal ratios, while more stratified societies result in a skewed ratio in favour of men, especially in the case of patriarchal societies. As women became much better represented in funerary epigraphy throughout the third century BC, the society of Chiusi should have initially developed towards a less stratified and more egalitarian society, to then be suddenly transformed into a strongly patriarchal society once the process of Latinization kicked in. Such major and fundamental changes in a relatively short period of time are not suggested by any other Etruscan evidence, and instead, we should look for answers in the specific use of funerary culture, as argued above.

This does not mean that Rome exerted no influence at all. However, Rome was itself undergoing major transitions during the Hellenistic period. As Roman society developed towards a higher status for women and children — as is visible during the late Republic and early Principate and expressed in more flexible divorces, shifting inheritance arrangements, and the disappearance of the marriage *cum manu* (e.g. Bonnard et al. 2017: 65–76) — it may still have had some ‘patriarchal’ influence on Etruscan society during the first century BC, resulting in a different function of funerary culture and less representation of women. During the first century AD, once the Roman transition was much further along, there was a general Italic development towards this higher status for women and children, which is expressed in the epitaphs of the Imperial period. In turn, epitaphs had become tools for expressing family grief throughout Italy, but it seems Etruscan funerary culture and the related epigraphy had changed for good.

In terms of Roman impact, a major factor is the transition from one epigraphic culture to another. This is made clear by the fact that the Etruscan and Latin inscriptions of the first century BC represent very different proportions for women in Chiusi. One may wonder, therefore, to what degree an actual change in mentality is responsible for the Latin gender ratio. Ultimately, there is a shift in epigraphic paradigms, as the use of a language comes with particular customs and expectations of what was considered appropriate content (cf. Mullen 2024: 29–31). While there are differences in the profile of those shifting to Latin throughout the first century BC — immigrants and associated smaller local families first, families with more longstanding pedigree last — all concerned individuals were well-integrated into the local funerary culture in material terms (Benelli 2019). As such, Latin was regarded as clearly different to Etruscan and, as a consequence, this resulted in a separate funerary discourse within an otherwise quite coherent material context.

Interestingly, there is no direct Roman equivalent of this Latin pattern in Chiusi, as the proportion of women in the Roman Empire is not quite as low. Based on MacDonnell’s 1913 data, Hopkins (1966: 261) determined that the overall gender ratio is 57.4:42.6, which is rather similar to that of the Etruscan inscriptions of Hellenistic Chiusi. However, this global average conceals real differences between age groups, as percentages vary between 51% and 63.4% for men. Still, they never reach the mark of 70%, like the Latin inscriptions of Chiusi do. Once more, the image of the ‘feminist’ Etruscans is debunked.

The many changes over the centuries in the gender ratio imply that there was no general and typical Etruscan custom of giving women more prominence in funerary culture. Rather, the greater representation of women in Hellenistic Chiusi was a phenomenon particular to its time, depending on the function and forms of funerary

culture and the representation of status and identity. It is perhaps no coincidence that the same period sees a surge in the use of the metronymic, greatly emphasizing the role of women in family continuity and descent (Daveloose 2023). In many ways, the late third and second centuries BC were an exceptional period for Etruscan women and their representation.

Conclusions

The so-called ‘rule of availability’ and the ‘rule of ubiquity’ appear to be insufficient as explanations for the variability seen in the gender ratios across time and space. What, then, caused these changes and why do some anticipated changes not occur? The most important impetus in this regard are the particular use and societal value of funerary culture and how these developed over time in relation to social change. The comparison of contemporaneous Etruscan and Latin funerary customs during the first century BC in Chiusi is revealing in this respect, with very different gender ratios at the same time. This suggests a significant impact of the epigraphic paradigms associated with these languages, rather than underlying social change. Yet the question remains, what does all of this say about daily life for the Etruscans and Etruscan women in particular? The regular variations in the gender ratio imply that underlying social relations between men and women did not play a major part in the degree to which women were represented in the epitaphs. Based on this evidence alone, there ought to have been fundamental changes to relations which were a cornerstone of society and social organization, without any suggestion of this in the plentiful other sources. As changes in the position of women in Rome were slow and gradual, it is hard to see dramatic and relatively quick transitions in this regard for Etruria. Still, there is much we do not know about later Etruscan communities and their inner workings. As civic communities may have changed substantially during the third and second century BC, parallel developments in gender relations are not impossible. For now, however, it must be concluded that the gender ratio mainly informs about funerary culture and how social organization was represented, rather than daily life itself.

Some information about social organization in the last three centuries BC can be gleaned from the evidence, however. For example, in the case of the preference of men over women, when production reaches a critical point or when a new medium is introduced. Generally speaking, men are more readily accorded an epitaph, to a degree that is similar to what is seen in the Roman Empire. I have already suggested that this is partly caused by the age difference between husband and wife, but this still means that women were probably heavily dependent upon their husband

to be accorded an epitaph. In this respect, one can wonder just how much the age difference between husband and wife determines the gender ratio, and how often other relatives arranged epitaphs. My preliminary research of funerary dedications suggests that, in most of these explicit cases, children erected a monument for a parent. This would mean that this type of dedicatory bond occurred often and that men were generally preferred when relatives had to decide who would receive a costly epitaph. Alternatively, the overall rare references to dedicators can be seen as the exception to the rule: these children announced their role as dedicator exactly because this was not the norm, but rather the duty of the spouse. For now, this question must remain open.

The transition to Latin typically coincided with lower female proportions, especially clear in the case of Chiusi. Tarquinia forms the main exception to this tendency, and it is perhaps no coincidence that the ratio of elites to non-elites in the Tarquinian epitaphs had remained more stable over the centuries than in Chiusi. At first sight, the impact of Latinization gives reason to uphold the old idea that women were more highly regarded in Etruscan society, compared to the rest of Italy. Roman influence would then be responsible for the smaller female presence in the Latin inscriptions. However, the Latin inscriptions offer much lower female proportions than those for Imperial Italy, bringing into question their role as a transitory medium between two modes of commemoration and raising the further question of whether these lower proportions are really caused by the Roman conquest and integration of Italy.

The transition from one epigraphic culture to another, typically accompanied by different customs and ideologies, further facilitated an existing change in funerary culture, related to prestige and social status. The process of Latinization, therefore, played an important role, but it is not at all certain that this resulted in a funerary culture that was more typically 'Roman'. Just like Etruscan funerary culture underwent a fundamental change at the beginning of the Hellenistic period, so it changed at the end of it, with significant local variations. Between both changes, women were fulfilling a different function in funerary culture, which became focused on the family group as a whole. Rather than being an arena for distinction and selection within family groups, these tombs were now more inclusive and showed a relatively complete image of families.¹⁵ Women were certainly a part of these collectives and were greatly valued as progenitors of new generations and links between families. It is this relatively strong presence of women that came to be associated with late Etruscan epigraphy – including votive inscriptions (Amann 2019) – subsequently causing a stark break with Latin epitaphs in most cases.

Abbreviations

- ET*² *Etruskische Texte* – Meiser, Gerhard. 2014. Editio minor, T.2. Texte. Studien zur historisch-vergleichenden Sprachwissenschaft 4. Hamburg: Baar.
- CIE* *Corpus Inscriptionum Etruscarum* – Danielson, Olav. 1893–1936. Vol. I (Volterra, Ager Saenensis, Chiusi), Vol. II (Tarquinia). Leipzig: Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* – Bormann, Eugen. 1888. Vol. XI. (Aemiliae, Etruriae, Umbriae Latinae). Berlin: Verlag Georg Reimer.

Notes

- ¹ This image has its foundation in Roman sources, but was mainly developed by Bachofen (1861; 1870) in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. For a detailed analysis of Bachofen's influence on Etruscology, see: Amann 2017a.
- ² For an overview of the history of the concept, see: Roth 2007: 9–39. Some of the works (e.g. Bruun 1975; Mansuelli 1988) dealing specifically with the 'Romanization' of Etruria are outdated in their approach by now.
- ³ The monuments from Tarquinia are also quite diverse. The surfaces for epitaphs include decorated tomb walls, sarcophagi (usually in tuff stone), and stone *cippi*. For Volterra, we are mostly dealing with ash chests of alabaster.
- ⁴ A very small selection regarding this subject, specifically questioning gender identity: Baglione 1989; Bonfante 1993; Amann 2000; Rallo 2001; Roth 2005; Izzet 2007; Taylor 2014; Meyers 2016.
- ⁵ Nielsen (1985: 194; 1989: 56) serves as a point of comparison here, as she has analysed the gender ratio as well, including a detailed and diachronic analysis of Volterra. Sloty (1950: 278–279) analysed 2,900 Etruscan inscriptions for men and 1,970 for women, resulting in percentages of 59.5% and 40.5%. More recently, Krämer (2022: 197–198) analysed the gender ratio for Tarquinia and its territory, concluding that for Tarquinia itself – and excluding uncertain individuals – 64% belongs to men and 36% belongs to women.
- ⁶ This matches Nielsen's (1985: 194) result of 57% almost exactly.
- ⁷ This matches almost exactly Nielsen's iconographic analysis and that of the inscriptions on *cippi* (Nielsen 1985: 194). Nielsen's result based on inscriptions on sarcophagi and tomb walls is still largely correct. A comparison can be made with the analysis of skeletons (Mallegni et. al. 1980: 190). These come from poorer graves with few grave goods, dating from the sixth to the second centuries BC. Out of a total of 56 skeletons, 31 belong to men, while 20 are female and five were too young to be determined. This results in 55% for men, 36% for women and 9% for children, or a ratio of 61:39 for men and women alone. This implies that the epigraphic gender ratio is representative of the funerary record in general.
- ⁸ *ET*² gives only 37 epitaphs for Cortona, while Arezzo has 83 epitaphs on cinerary urns. Nielsen's (1985: 194) numbers are only 20 and 59, respectively.
- ⁹ A term invented by the author of this paper and not used by Nielsen herself.
- ¹⁰ In *ET*² AS 1.311, a woman is mentioned as a co-dedicator, together with her probable husband.
- ¹¹ By Nielsen defined as '... the political, economic, social, cultural and linguistic changes brought about by territorial losses and the founding of Latin and Roman colonies'.
- ¹² This is a train of thought similar to the one deployed by Riva (2010) in her study of Orientalizing tombs and their political use.
- ¹³ The same can be said about the metronymic, which was barely used before the fourth century BC (van Hulle 2024: 122).
- ¹⁴ Nielsen (1989: 94) gives several examples of the different scenarios in terms of these ratios. It is interesting to note that it is mainly the earliest Italic cases – Villanovan and Orientalizing – that have the greatest equality between men and women.
- ¹⁵ This more 'complete' image mainly pertains to adults. While older children (+10 years) are epigraphically present in realistic proportions among the Etruscan epitaphs, younger children are severely underrepresented. Curiously, the Latin epitaphs belong more often to children (younger than 15 years) compared to the Etruscan texts: 11.4% of all Latin ages compared to the Etruscan 7.7%.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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